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# Mothers at Work: Reconstruction and Deconstruction of Patriarchy in *Gone with the Wind*

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MOTHERS AT WORK: RECONSTRUCTION AND DECONSTRUCTION OF  
PATRIARCHY IN *GONE WITH THE WIND*

A Thesis submitted to  
the Graduate College of  
Marshall University

In partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

English  
by  
Catherine Willa Staley

Approved by  
Dr. Jane Hill, Committee Chairperson  
Dr. Michael Householder  
Dr. Whitney Douglas

Marshall University  
May 2012

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## Abstract

In this thesis, I explore the performances of motherhood in Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* and how those performances conflict with culturally constructed expectations of that role. An analysis of Scarlett O'Hara and Melanie Wilkes, and how each woman compares to the South's model for motherhood, reveals implications that extend beyond the novel's Civil War setting to reveal the ongoing negotiation of modern readers still living within patriarchal conceptions of mothering. In Chapter 1, I outline the novel's spectrum of motherhood, which is composed of characters who nurture and manage others. Each individual on that spectrum contributes to or rejects the traditional model of motherhood. In Chapter 2, I analyze Scarlett's rejection of motherly expectations in favor of financial security and the consequences of that decision for not only her offspring but future generations in the South. In Chapter 3, I examine the conflict between Melanie's desire to have children and her inadequate body, a conflict that ultimately leads to her death and reflects the fate of the Confederacy. Mitchell, I conclude, utilized narrative's powerful rhetoric to reveal the choices women must make when navigating their performances of motherhood because mothers are responsible for (re)constructing cultures when crisis disrupts existing norms.

### **Belles, Breeding, and Babies: Mapping the Motherhood Spectrum**

If Scarlett O'Hara and Melanie Hamilton exist on a spectrum of motherhood, their relative positions are determined by the novel's "other" mothers. That spectrum is based on the Southern code of motherhood conduct – a code that favors guidance, stability, and nurturing. Women were responsible for performing those virtues and transmitting them to new generations. If Scarlett and Melanie rest at opposite ends of the spectrum – one repulsed by children and the other obsessed with them – then Ellen, Mammy, Beatrice Tarleton, Uncle Peter, Tara itself, Belle Watling, Grandma Fontaine, and Rhett Butler fill in the spaces between them. Only Ellen, Beatrice, Grandma Fontaine, and Belle physically bear children; the others – men, slaves, and land alike – are figurative caretakers who influence the performance society expects from women; thus, the spectrum is diverse, a quality that suggests how much "mothering" a new civilization and its inhabitants require. This particular spectrum also reveals that mothering could look drastically different in a new world – there will be room, even demand, for alternative performances.

Half of the characters I consider mothers diverge sharply from the traditional figure because of an absence created by dead or invisible biological mothers. Ellen's mother is dead before she marries Gerald; otherwise, one wonders if such an odd match would have happened (71). Similarly, Ashley's and Melanie's mothers are dead before the novel begins (109, 151). Rhett's family (mother included until after the war) has rejected him (112). Room exists, then, for others to assume that vacant position and represent different but successful models of motherhood – being a mother, Mitchell's novel suggests, does not necessarily have to go hand-in-hand with being a woman; others, particularly men, can fulfill that role, if not biologically then emotionally. This

adaptability also indicates that motherhood is, for Mitchell, not only the physical act of bearing a child but also a socially constructed position, often designed and built by and for *others*. Individuals, then, study the varied performances of that role before locating themselves on the spectrum.

Thus, an analysis of the mothers who populate and re-populate *Gone with the Wind*'s world reveals the changing landscape of that performance in the family and public spheres when a civilization collapses then reconstructs itself. Mitchell's twentieth-century perspective inevitably includes a burgeoning women's movement and the reproductive-rights possibilities of her time. An impending world war and its effect on her peers' notions of family and work that would echo the Civil War's impact on Southern society's ideas of nationalism and survival also clearly inform Mitchell's thinking. In both time frames — the novel's setting and the era of its composition — her representation of motherhood reveals who will prepare each generation and what those "mothers" will have as their agenda. Females from all generations are bound by the burden of that motherhood, or at least that potential for that burden. Darden Asbury Pyron, author of *The Life of Margaret Mitchell and the Making of Gone with the Wind*, suggests that motherhood is the "weary load" that unites Mitchell's characters and readers. He argues that "sex, reproduction, pregnancy, motherhood, babies, children, domesticity – that whole set of values associated with home and the woman's sphere" (282) are the burden of females. In *The Wind Is Never Gone*, Carmen Gomez-Galisteo examines *GWTW*'s legacy and concludes that the consequences of that burden are more relevant to Mitchell's initial and current readers because the novel "tells more about the lost generation [Mitchell's generation coming of age in the wake of WWI] than of



nineteenth century Southerners" (19). Furthermore, according to Gomez-Galisteo, *GWTW* “was revolutionary because it did not portray motherhood as a woman's central task in life. What is more, it challenged conventional ideals that motherhood sweetened women, much to Frank Kennedy's distress” (157). Acknowledging that the novel is perhaps best known to its popular audience for Rhett and Scarlett’s tormented love affair, serious readers must interrogate its subtler themes to understand the ideals and demands that Mitchell’s female audiences would have negotiated.

Despite being published forty years after Mitchell’s best seller, Adrienne Rich’s *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* provides a useful lens for exploring the theme of motherhood and domesticity. Rich purposefully directs critical attention towards the maternal experience because “we know more about the air we breathe, the seas we travel, than about the nature and meaning of motherhood” (11); as a corrective, she encourages the examination of our culture’s representations of this presumed strictly feminine role. *GWTW*’s representation of race, its *bildungsroman* plot, and even its representation of gender roles have been analyzed and debated, but the issue of motherhood is usually explored only in scholarship focused on Scarlett’s feminist notions. Although that connection is valuable and certainly at the foundation of this discussion, the focus can be sharpened to include the cultural expectations for motherhood to which Mitchell responds.

Rich is, moreover, primarily concerned with representations of motherhood created under patriarchy, the cultural force (in the form of war) responsible for demanding new performances of motherhood by Scarlett, Melanie, and others. Rich claims, “The power of the mother has two aspects: the biological potential or capacity to

bear and nourish human life, and the magical power invested in women by men, whether in the form of Goddess-worship or the fear of being controlled and overwhelmed by women” (13). Mitchell’s women become Goddess figures when placed on figurative pedestals by men who deem them fragile and incompetent in matters outside the home. They are kept on those pedestals with tight corsets and an illusion of power exerted over young beaux and domestic matters. When war begins and no one can afford pedestals anymore, patriarchy’s grip is slightly loosened. For Mitchell’s generation and her readers, in particular, that grip is further relaxed (or rather, is being pried loose from reluctant fingers) because of the burgeoning women’s rights movement born of the suffrage movement and the liberation of the Roaring Twenties and an impending world war. The opportunity to redefine “Mom” was on the, albeit barely visible, horizon.

The beginning whispers of such discussions can be found in the rhetoric of Mitchell’s journalism career; many of her articles, written in the 1920s, focus on the consequences of women working and voting. In one article titled “Do Husbands Object to Their Wives Voting?,” a young woman whom Mitchell interviews explains, “Young husbands make no more than a passing protest against [their wives losing money in bridge or smoking cigarettes], whereas when it comes to voting, they talk about 'woman's plan in the home' and 'duty to children' and all the other wornout platitudes” (59). Such platitudes form the foundation of a traditional marriage. If a woman asserts her political power by voting, she threatens not only that model of marriage but her ability to be a mother. The vote allows her to push back against the forces that keep her contained in the home with the children. In a similar article, “Jobs before Marriage for High School Girls,” Mitchell presents the concerns of career-minded females. When she asks the

group, “‘Then it is independence that makes all of you want jobs?’” (72), they reply with “‘Self-expression!’ ‘Independence!’ and ‘Paycheck!’” (72). Their priority, at least until marriage, is to assert themselves financially. With this new power, central to the script of money and votes, the young women who will make up Mitchell’s future readership thus shape their performance of motherhood in relation to “domestic” politics.

Before establishing how the performance of Southern motherhood looks to Scarlett and Melanie, the first scene of the novel makes clear what that model *does not* resemble: the Yankee notion of raising children. The Tarleton twins describe Cathleen Calvert’s Northern stepmother as “a skinny hen perched on a chair, her eyes kind of bright and blank and scared, all ready to flap and squawk at the slightest move anybody makes” (36). Ready to “flap and squawk at the slightest move anybody makes,” this Yankee mother does not exhibit the cool demeanor of Ellen O’Hara, whom we see tend to an ill neighbor, lead the family in prayers, and dismiss an unruly overseer all within the first five chapters of the novel; nor does the Yankee have the same commanding presence as the twins’ mother, Beatrice Tarleton, who whips colts into submission and boys into gentlemen. Mrs. Calvert exists as an outlier against whom to evaluate the prototypical Southern woman.

The same scene illustrates the primary goal of Southern motherhood. When describing Scarlett’s physical appearance and charming disposition, the narrator emphasizes that her “manners had been imposed upon her by her mother’s gentle admonitions and the sterner discipline of her mammy” (25). One can assume that Scarlett’s “seventeen-inch-waist, the smallest in three counties” (25) is imposed on her by a tightly laced corset. Her body and her behavior are controlled: one by a socially

constructed fashion statement and the other by two women responsible for making sure that she develops into a proper lady. According to the narrator, Scarlett can control only her eyes, so one pictures a doll-like girl posed and primped and practically trapped. Mothers and mammies, then, are key players in the future performances upon which this culture relies. Mothers buy the corsets for their daughters; mammies tighten them for their mistresses; they direct young women for public moments, like the one the reader first sees Scarlett engaged in, when beaux demand attention. Without mothers, this Southern show would not go on.

Mothers are not only pulling the strings in this scene, but are also a topic of conversation, along with war and an engagement – destruction and reconstruction – the novel’s primary themes. Scarlett’s beaux, the Tarleton twins, predict how their mother, Beatrice, will react to their latest expulsion from university. To illustrate the power she holds over her brood, the boys recount to Scarlett what happened the last time she broke a new colt for her horse farm: “When we got home, Ma was out in the stable with a sackful of sugar smoothing him down and doing it mighty well, too. The darkies were hanging from the rafters, popeyed, they were so scared, but Ma was talking to the horse like he was folks and he was eating out of her hand” (28). With visible force, Beatrice breaks her sons and colts, even if they seem too wild to tame. The early appearance of this powerful woman, one who has reared eight members of Southern society, strongly resembles the future Scarlett. Mitchell’s choice to introduce this matriarch with flaming red hair and a “[hot-temper]” (28) within the first few pages suggests that she is setting the stage for a production about mothers like and unlike Beatrice and sons and daughters like and unlike Scarlett and the twins.

Once Beatrice breaks her boys, she is most concerned with finding them suitable mates, “her favorite topic” being “breeding, whether it be horses or humans” (104) made evident by a frank discussion she carries on with Scarlett’s father, Gerald. When Melanie Hamilton’s engagement to Ashley Wilkes comes up, Beatrice considers the match’s quality in terms of genetics: will they improve the Southern stock by mating? Her conclusion is “that family needs new blood, fine vigorous blood like my red heads or your Scarlett [. . .] [The Wilkes] are overbred and inbred too, aren’t they?” (104). She references the Wilkes’ custom of marrying cousins, which seems to have diluted their pedigree. Her assessment, based on physical compatibility rather than personality, suggests that she views a mother’s responsibility as guiding her children toward suitors who will contribute positively to the gene pool, whether said suitors make the individuals happy or leave them longing for love even as they “breed.”

Beatrice’s preoccupations as mother shapes her reaction to the death of her sons and numerous horses for the Cause. When Scarlett returns to Tara for her father’s funeral, Grandma Fontaine, a neighbor, observes to her that Beatrice’s “mainspring [is] busted” (667) because she “wasn’t ever happy unless horses or humans were breeding right in her face and none of her girls are married or got any prospects of catching husbands in this county, so she’s got nothing to occupy her mind” (667). The use of the words *breeding* and *blood* in association with horses is expected, but to reduce marital relations to language applied to farm animals suggests that Beatrice focuses on the stock involved in either case; in other words, wanting to produce quality colts, she would choose mares based on their strength and agility. One then must assume she takes the matching of her

children with spouses just as seriously and regards reproduction as a way to strengthen the family line or uphold the Tarleton name and, therefore, preserve Southern culture.

Scarlett's mother, Ellen, on the other hand, displays an indifference towards "breeding," human or otherwise, and thus represents another type of mother: the quietly commanding plantation mistress. From Scarlett's perspective, Ellen doesn't concern herself with such private matters; rather, "mares never foaled nor cows calved. In fact, hens almost didn't lay eggs" (102). Unlike Beatrice, who takes great pleasure in, even prides herself on, such knowledge, Ellen seems to ignore the biological part of life. If breeding and mating are issues that happen behind the scenes, Ellen appears far more concerned with the final product than with what she prefers not to see in process.

From her first appearance in the novel, Mitchell establishes Ellen's roles as wife and mother to be the driving forces in her performance of motherhood. Readers can assume that Ellen models this behavior on behalf of Scarlett, who, like an understudy, should be absorbing her attitude and actions. That modeling suggests that mothers act "as dutiful soldiers or even martinets" (276), according to Pyron. We see Ellen act as a dutiful soldier when her daughter and husband approach the house and she greets him with "Mr. O'Hara" and then the narrator interrupts to explain that "Ellen belonged to a generation that was formal even after seventeen years of wedlock and the bearing of six children" (56). Considering her refusal to acknowledge reproduction amongst animals, the reader cannot be surprised that Ellen exhibits this formal etiquette despite matrimony's intimacy. Because the narrator is compelled to explain that Ellen's mode of address is a generational habit, the reader must realize that the author is aware of and planning to emphasize a shifting landscape of marriage, a movement similar to the one

that her audience is currently witnessing or will witness<sup>1</sup>. Such formality may not survive in their post-bellum world when relations between man and wife have inevitably been reconfigured.

The following exchange between the O'Haras and the narrator's accompanying commentary foreshadow that shift and contribute to the reader's understanding of Ellen's role as mother. Ellen explains to Gerald that "there is illness at the Slattery house. Emmie's baby has been born and is dying and must be baptized. [She is] going there with Mammy to see what [she] can do" (56). After her informing Gerald of her plans, the narrator again directs our attention to her display of expected wifely qualities: "her voice was raised questioningly, as though she hung on Gerald's assent to her plan, a mere formality but one dear to the heart of Gerald" (56). The narrator assumes, once again, that the reader needs Ellen's tone explained; it may seem so foreign to Mitchell's readers that a woman would wait for her husband to approve of her actions that such direction is necessary to our understanding. The author makes clear that Ellen does not necessarily need Gerald's approval, but rather she knows he wants to feel as if he has the power to dispense approval prior to her acting. Thus, the "appearance" of spousal permission contributes to her performance of the wife's role, interpreting that role as dependent on the husband in appearance rather than in fact. His response suggests he realizes, too, that Ellen doesn't want or need his permission: "Go, Mrs. O'Hara. You'd not rest easy on your pillow the night if there was trouble abroad and you not there to help" (56). Referencing a predictable restlessness, Ellen's husband believes that she is compelled to help out of compassion rather than obligation. The "trouble" he alludes to is strictly under

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout the novel, the narrator's commentary and the thoughts and dialogue of characters (mainly Scarlett's) are intertwined. My argument assumes the narrator is a reliable one. Further scholarship could explore that assumption and the narrator's role as a character double.

the control of women. It is not his responsibility to interfere with the birth of the Slattery baby, and the men surrounding Emmy are assumed to be helpless, or uninterested, in this situation. Other types of trouble – financial and political – are the domain of men, but children, and specifically the messy business of birth, are entirely a female concern. To bring life into the world, a wealthy plantation mistress, a house slave, and a lower-class “white trash” woman are united. Just as Scarlett, Prissy, and Will Benteen (a poor planter) will come together to reconstruct Tara, here three women set aside class differences to tend to mothering as essential social institution.

The reader sees not only Ellen’s loyalty to ceremony and indiscriminate charity towards her neighbors, but also the adoration that Scarlett (who will eventually reject both of those qualities) feels. Scarlett finds comfort in her mother during her distress over Ashley and Melanie’s engagement and “thrilled to the never-failing magic of her mother’s touch, to the faint fragrance of lemon verbena sachet that came from her rustling silk dress. To [her], there was something breath-taking about Ellen O’Hara, a miracle that lived in the house with her and awed her and charmed and soothed her” (57). That any individual could be believably described with so many strong words would seem implausible; “breath-taking,” “miracle,” “awed,” “charmed,” and “soothed” set high expectations for a single human being; such language reveals Scarlett’s inflated vision of what her mother actually does, one that echoes Gerald’s interpretation of Ellen’s longing to help Emmy as empathy rather than responsibility.

Ellen’s physical appearance, provided directly by the narrator rather than filtered through family eyes, sharply contrasts with these assumptions. Ellen isn’t described as some sort of ethereal or heavenly being. Instead, the narrator says that she “would have



been a strikingly beautiful woman had there been any glow in her eyes, any responsive warmth in her smile or any spontaneity in her voice” (58). Her lack of “glow,” “warmth,” and “spontaneity” suggests that Ellen fulfills her duties because that is just what they are – duties and obligations placed on her by society rather than desires inherent in her personality. She is a woman, so whether she wants to or not, she must tend to ushering life into and out of this world. She smiles, not to connect with another person, but to keep up a façade. For Mitchell’s narrator, Ellen is devoid of any spark, and her family’s contradictory perception of her as a mother supports the conclusion that they prefer her to exist as a mystery. Because Ellen’s character is developed in a few pages, Pyron adds to this reading that “the actual space allowed this character indicates her ambiguous place within the novel” (276). To be comforted by her mother’s absence (albeit because she’s tending to other families) suggests that Scarlett finds solace in the *idea* of Ellen’s nurturing abilities rather than the execution of them. Gerald, too, is enamored by a “steely quality under her stately gentleness” (Mitchell 59). Adoring a “steely” or cold attitude contrasts with the warmth one expects men and children to seek in the mothers around them. This description also lends itself to the reader’s thinking of Ellen as a silent figure of stability. As long as she stands at the gate between life and death, the world of Tara is balanced.

Three deaths that Ellen couldn’t control or maintain a cool distance from were those of her sons born after her youngest daughter, Careen – “three little boys who now lay under the twisted cedars in the burying ground a hundred yards from the house, beneath three stones, each bearing the name, “Gerald O’Hara, Jr.” (73). She creates three future mothers but is unable to produce potential fathers or, more urgently, soldiers for

the Cause. Later, because Scarlett is the eldest with no male siblings, she becomes the man of the family when Gerald falls ill. That the namesake of Gerald could not survive to adulthood foreshadows the establishment of a new South that will not allow men like Gerald to live.

A common thread does unite Beatrice and Ellen, despite their outwardly different appearances and approaches. The former's motto in regard to horses and children is, according to the narrator, "Curb them but don't break their spirits" (100). She wants her children to be lively and personable, but she also realizes that ladies and gentlemen are expected to behave a certain way. Ellen exhibits the same philosophy; she's proud of Scarlett's "high spirits, vivacity, and charm [because] these were traits of which Southern women were proud. It was Gerald's headstrong and impetuous nature in [Scarlett] that gave [Ellen and Mammy] concern" (76). Gerald and Ellen demonstrate a balance that Gerald and Beatrice wouldn't have as partners. If Scarlett had been born Beatrice's daughter, she may not have learned the enchanting tricks she later employs on men in order to survive Reconstruction. Scarlett's comparison of these two mothers further reveals the difference between their approaches to rearing children:

Scarlett laughed with the rest at these sallies but, as always, the freedom with which the Tarletons treated their mother came as a shock. They acted as if she were one of themselves and not a day over sixteen. To Scarlett, the very idea of saying such things to her own mother was almost sacrilegious. And yet – and yet – there was something very pleasant about the Tarleton girls' relations with their mother, and they adored her for all they criticized and scolded and teased her. Not, Scarlett loyally hastened to tell herself, that she would prefer a mother like

Mrs. Tarleton to Ellen, but still it would be fun to romp with a mother. She knew that even that thought was disrespectful to Ellen and felt ashamed of it. (101)

Reading this scene with the knowledge of Scarlett's future exposes to Mitchell's readers the careful balance of Gerald and Ellen's parenting that allows Scarlett to survive after war. She is armed with Ellen's training and fueled by Gerald's zeal in order cleverly to catch husbands and defy social customs concerning women and work. If she had been born of Beatrice, who is occupied with her horses and sons, she may never have been able to adapt. This assumption is supported by the juxtaposition of Scarlett's financial success in Reconstruction and Beatrice's priority of buying expensive tombstones for her sons' graves when food is scarce (467).

Analyzing this quick fantasy of an alternative mother in terms of the relationship between mother and daughter, Scarlett wishes to "romp with *a* mother," realizing that she could never do so with "her" mother, whose cool distance from the girls instilled in them a deep sense of respect for her as their mother. That respect runs so deep that Scarlett doesn't even consider her own mind an appropriate place for such musings. This is the same mind that pages before was labeling Melanie Wilkes a "mousy little person" (42) and, during evening prayers, plots to destroy an engagement (86). Because she is clearly capable of such thoughts but chastises herself for innocently imagining a different life, Scarlett obviously holds her love and adoration for Ellen to a higher standard than she does many emotions. Through thinking such things to be "sacrilegious," Scarlett clearly considers Ellen to be sacred or holy; scenes before, the narrator has elaborated on Scarlett's connection between her mother and the Virgin Mary: "'Health of the Sick,' 'Seat of Wisdom,' 'Refuge of Sinners,' 'Mystical Rose' – they were beautiful words

because they were the attributes of Ellen” (87). To associate one’s mother with the mother of Jesus suggests that Scarlett has built her own pedestal for Ellen from the material of unrealistic and unachievable expectations<sup>2</sup>. To be a “refuge,” a healer both wise and “mystical” is a heavy burden for a woman married to Gerald, managing a back-country plantation, and raising three teenage daughters. Furthermore, “to [Scarlett], Ellen represented the utter security that only Heaven or a mother can give. She knew that her mother was the embodiment of justice, truth, loving tenderness, and profound wisdom – a great lady” (77). But upon Ellen’s death and Scarlett’s realization that “nothing [her] mother had taught her was of any value whatsoever” (413) after war, that security diminishes. What Scarlett cannot fathom (but the reader knows) is that all along Ellen has been doing what society expects from females of her station, not fulfilling a call from God to exist as a sort of Heaven on Earth.

No matter how heavenly or pure she may seem, Ellen eventually succumbs to crisis because she is so dedicated to her position as nurturer. Scarlett flees a burning Atlanta for Tara only to find Ellen dead from a sickness she caught by nursing the Slatterys, Suellen, and Carreen. Gerald explains that “[the doctor] told [him] when they moved on that the girls would recover but [her] mother – She was so frail, he said – too frail to stand it all. He said she had undermined her strength. . .” (393). The “all” in that statement can be extended to include not just the sickness but war and the devastation caused by it. In that devastation, the draining activity of nursing the sick cannot be made up for with the help of slaves and a hearty meal. All but a few of the slaves have fled and

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<sup>2</sup> Scarlett’s association of Ellen with the Virgin Mary also suggests that Scarlett may perceive herself as a Jesus-figure. Because she spends the entire novel trying to keep herself and others alive but is left with no husband and no friends, Scarlett seems to have sacrificed herself for the good of the whole. Mitchell’s comparison of Ellen and the Virgin Mary could foreshadow Scarlett’s ultimate fate.

food is scarce, most of it going to those who are ailing. Ellen's "strength" diminishes because of a lack of resources she would have (and has had) at her disposal in better times. If a woman isn't physically able to be a mother, then what becomes of her in this new world? Her powers to nurture and protect are insufficient in the face of war's power to eradicate.

By rights, that power would be transferred to Scarlett, who clearly knows this is her destiny. She observes, "her father was old and stunned, her sisters ill, Melanie frail and weak, the children helpless, and the negroes looking up to her with childlike faith, clinging to her skirts, knowing that Ellen's daughter would be the refuge Ellen had always been" (399). Much like Tara's red soil, she is supposed to be a domestic "tower" or "refuge" in the midst of war. If Ellen had lived; or, for that matter, if her sons had seen adulthood and Gerald were not traumatized, then Scarlett would never have gotten the chance to evolve from belle to businesswoman. The transfer of motherly power happened, but it's a power that Scarlett has to (re)make her own and then use for her own radical purposes. Still, she is always aware of Ellen's spirit and seems to stretch to reach her mother on the spectrum of motherhood. Pyron recognizes the influence Ellen has over Scarlett even in death; in fact, he believes "[Ellen's] power actually grows once she shuffles off her mortal coil" (276) because she lingers in Scarlett's memory as an ideal against which the daughter judges her own actions.

Beside Ellen on that spectrum is Mammy, the house slave named for her primary duties. Mammy continues to watch over Scarlett even after Ellen's death and her own emancipation. The reader's first exposure to Mammy's power over Scarlett happens in the opening scene with the Tarletons. The narrator explains that "Mammy felt that she

owned the O'Haras, body and soul, and their secrets were her secrets; and even a hint of mystery was enough to set her upon the trail as relentlessly as a bloodhound" (Mitchell 42). Despite the O'Haras' literal ownership of Mammy, she displays more control than anyone else over Scarlett's every social step because "whom Mammy loved, she chastened. And, as her love for Scarlett and her pride in her were enormous, the chastening process was practically continuous" (43). While Ellen leads prayers, tends to the sick, and sorts out plantation business – thus, spending a substantial amount of time away from her children – Mammy tends to their physical needs. It's expected that a house slave would be a constant presence in owners' lives, but Mammy's concerns extend beyond labor, a dynamic made evident in her exclamation of "'Mammy's chile is home!'" (396). Later, she proudly boasts, "'ain' nobody go a wais' lak mah lamb'" (94), *lamb* here signifying not only race but also offspring. Society has dictated that Mammy will be a servant to her mistress, but an unfettered intimacy has transformed them into mother and "chile." Even when the slave/mistress relationship defines their interactions, such as when Mammy's laces Scarlett's corset, the maternal connection persists. So, as she costumes Scarlett to perform the part of a belle, Mammy complements and supplements Ellen's training.

Just as the narrator make clear that Ellen commands with a silent power, so too does she clarify that "Mammy's victories over Scarlett were hard-won and represented guile unknown to the white mind" (97). In other words, Scarlett's final social identity is achieved only because of Mammy and Ellen's collaboration on its script and, the narrator's commentary indicates, because Mammy is black. After war, even though she stays by Scarlett's side, slaves can no longer be an *assumed* part of the crew responsible

for “mothering.” Ellen’s style of mothering dies with war and the complementary approach and presence of mammies eventually does the same – leaving future generations of mothers without appropriate models or support systems for the old ways.

A superficially similar yet drastically different partnership exists between Melanie’s Aunt Pittypat and her father’s former body servant, referred to by his owners as Uncle Peter. Unlike Ellen, Pittypat is an old maid, portrayed by the narrator more as a child than adult. We first see her at Scarlett’s wedding to Charles, Pittypat’s nephew and Melanie’s brother. The narrator observes that, for Scarlett, “the excitement caused by the swooning spell that overtook Charles’ plump emotional aunt, Miss Pittypat Hamilton, had the quality of a nightmare” (140). The nightmare image certainly suggests something about Scarlett’s attitude towards her nuptials, but it also illuminates Pittypat as a woman who cannot control her feelings and publicly expresses herself in a way one might imagine predictable in an inexperienced young belle. Pittypat (as her name signals) isn’t the staunch tower of stability and grace that Ellen is, yet she is the closest thing to Charles’s mother and fills the merely ceremonial role of chaperone for Melanie and Scarlett in Atlanta. Her mentorship is ceremonial because those around her are in on a “kindly conspiracy to keep her a sheltered and petted old child” (162). Through this conscious and “kind” conspiracy, then, Mitchell lets her readers know that narrator and characters share the perception that Pittypat is “less than” an adult. She performs as a matron of Atlanta, but her friends and acquaintances treat her as if she cannot take care of herself or others. Nevertheless, when Melanie and Charles need a mother, society presumes it not only reasonable but natural that they live with their infantile aunt.

The real maternal force here, however, is Uncle Peter – a slave, like Mammy, whose name reflects his familial status. Pittypat may have been the figurative caretaker, but Peter is the one who “decided [Charles] should have a larger allowance when [he] was fifteen, and [Peter] insisted that [Charles] should go to Harvard for [his] senior year [. . .] and he decided when Melly was old enough to put up her hair and go to parties” (151-2). He even assumed motherly duties over Pittypat and “tells [her] when it’s too cold or too wet for her to go calling and when she should wear a shawl. . .” (152). Earlier, we see Mammy chide Scarlett for neglecting to wear a shawl and Ellen deciding when Carreen is mature enough to attend a ball (83), and now we hear Peter dispense the same advice for children and women. In the absence of biological mothers – whether a physical absence in Melly’s case, an emotional absence in the case of the stolid Ellen, and/or psychologically fit mother surrogates as with Pittypat, those bound to an institution soon to be abolished must fill in the gap regardless of gender.

The aforementioned women and man are the mothers Mitchell’s female protagonists would have been exposed to from an early age; thus, when Scarlett and Melanie have children, their foundational understanding of what is expected of that role has been established by those in their narrow social circles. As that circle expands because of war and the need for such mothers to comfort and advise grows, unexpected maternal sources spring forth. The O’Hara plantation Tara, Belle Watling, Rhett Butler, and Grandma Fontaine provide varying kinds of nurture in the new South, where the Ellens and Beatrices cannot always live.

At the novel’s conclusion, with Ellen and Melanie dead and Rhett gone, Scarlett wishes to escape to Tara (959) in the same way she longed for Ellen while fleeing a



burning Atlanta some years prior. Mitchell draws the similarities between her home and mother in the first few chapters: she “loved this land so much, without even knowing she loved it, loved it as she loved her mother's face under the lamp at prayer time” (47). Scarlett adores her mother’s face at a time when her mother’s thoughts are private, closed off to everyone but God; thus the daughter doesn’t actually know what she loves in that moment beyond the solemnity of Ellen’s expression, but she does know something spiritual and desirable exists in that face. Similarly, Scarlett originally fails to understand the significance as more than a house – she cannot comprehend a nurturing strength inextricable from the red clay earth and blooming magnolia trees. On the journey from Atlanta to Tara after the birth of Melly’s baby, Scarlett makes another comparison between her mother and home that foreshadows her impending disappointment. She observes, “The countryside lay as under some dread enchantment. Or worse still [. . .] like the familiar and dear face of a mother, beautiful and quiet at last, after death agonies” (380). Not only does this description foreshadow Ellen’s death, but that which makes the land living, in this case the Southern people, is gone from it; it’s the same land, but its vibrancy has been extinguished because of war. Dead mothers and dead land cannot produce and nurture life.

Gerald, however, is constantly reminding Scarlett of the land’s sustaining and adaptive power. First, when she is preoccupied with Ashley’s engagement and senses that she needs perspective:

“Land is the only thing in the world that amounts to anything,” he shouted, his thick short arms making wide gestures of indignation, “for 'tis the only thing in

this world that lasts, and don't you be forgetting it! 'Tis the only thing worth working for, worth fighting for –worth dying for.” (55)

Gerald's characterization of his land – of land as a source of nourishment and nurturing – draws further parallels between Tara again evokes a parallel to mothers. Even if a woman doesn't survive, her offspring can; the land's original cotton may be gone but new cotton will grow. Mothers produce daughters to replenish the culture. Tara provides soil for fresh crops and livestock to replenish that culture's economic system. Those daughters and that system won't look the same as before, but they will (re)build the world that has been lost. His argument that one should work, fight, and die for the land echoes chivalrous notions of knights fighting for their ladies – in this case, Southerners fighting for their plantations, wives, mothers, and sisters. Even when he's lost his mind and wife, Gerald remains true to his sentiments towards the land, asserting that “to anyone with a drop of Irish blood in them the land they live on is like their mother” (414). The mother and the land, when men and women have reached their lowest, can provide a space for (re)birth.

When Scarlett does reach a low point, another mother attempts to warn her that she will have to be her own source of comfort after civilization has collapsed. Grandma Fontaine, a neighbor and county doctor's wife, has watched Indians scalp her mother, even remembers that “every so often one Indian would go back to her and sink his tommyhawk into her skull again” (430); her mother, and the values she stood for, have been repetitively silenced by an external force, beyond Grandma Fontaine's control. Like Scarlett, she has had to navigate motherhood without the guiding light of the woman who modeled that position for her. Indians and Yankees, enemies created by politics, not by

the women who populate plantations and frontier cabins, apply pressure to society until it gives. In this case, the institution of motherhood cracks and demands repair, work left up to Scarlett, Melanie, and the “mothers” around them.

Contributing to that repair is an additional image of motherhood in Belle Watling, Atlanta’s most popular brothel madam and Rhett Butler’s companion, who suggests that, no matter a woman’s station in life, she can be a source of emotional sustenance. As a madam, Belle is responsible for the well-being and management of her “girls.” She saves Ashley and the other KKK members by claiming, and forcing her girls to claim, that the men have been at her place of business on the night Yankees had been killed to defend Scarlett’s honor. Just as Ellen is a master of Tara, Belle is the master of her domain – one that is, in the words of Mrs. Meade, a “bad house” (759) but a domestic sphere nonetheless.

On the occasion of Scarlett’s first encounter with the madam, the narrator describes Belle as having “a bold face and a mass of red hair” (157) – a description that seems fitting for a nineteenth-century prostitute; when Scarlett suspects Rhett of taking refuge at Belle’s house, the narrator portrays her as “almost motherly looking”(927), an unlikely quality to assign her. It is as if her experiences in Reconstruction transform Belle from a provider of sex into a source of comfort for Rhett, whose needs have changed, too. Belle’s character is further developed beyond the brothel walls when the reader learns that she lied on Ashley’s behalf because she thought of Melanie’s son growing up fatherless and, as a mother herself, wouldn’t want that to happen (761). She and Melanie can be united by this common thread of bearing sons, regardless of their drastically

divergent social statuses. This notion forces Mitchell's readers to interrogate the idea that women like Ellen and Beatrice may not be the only models for "good" mothers.

Rhett Butler's character further complicates the image of maternity; his concern with keeping Southern girls fashionable (and, thus, marriage material) and his affinity for dishing out advice aligns him in unusual ways with Ellen and Grandma Fontaine. His typical target for this behavior is, of course, Scarlett. As a blockade runner, one would expect him to be smuggling in precious goods and army supplies, which he does, but he also focuses on bringing in the latest fashions for the girls (184). For example, to coax Scarlett out of mourning, he delivers her a green Parisian hat. When she, with purpose unbeknownst to him, dons it incorrectly, he is outraged that the war has prevented fashionable (i.e. vain) girls like Scarlett from knowing the latest styles. His sartorial provisions for her echo Mammy's responsibility for lacing her up – part of a mother's duty in this culture is to ensure her daughters have all the material tools necessary to woo a gentleman into marriage.

Rhett's domain extends beyond fashion and into social decorum when, just as Ellen coaches her on what gifts from beaux are acceptable, Rhett warns Scarlett:

When you are trying to get something out of a man, don't blurt it out as you did to me. Do try to be more subtle, more seductive. It gets better results. You used to know how, to perfection. But just now when you offered me your -- er -- collateral for my money you looked as hard as nails. I've seen eyes like yours above a dueling pistol twenty paces from me and they aren't a pleasant sight. They evoke no ardor in the male breast. That's no way to handle men, my dear. You are forgetting your early training. (550)

His advice sounds different than Ellen's, however, in that it is blunt and direct. One cannot imagine Ellen suggesting that a girl act a certain way to "get something out of a man," but Rhett realizes (and has been on the receiving end of such behavior) that behind the "early training" of Southern ladies is that motivation, spoken or not. He takes this one step further and encourages her to use her body in a more "seductive" way to achieve her purposes with men. Rhett seems unafraid to vocalize the unspoken guidelines that govern gender relations in their world. He recognizes and names Scarlett's simpering attitude for what it is: a methodical male trap ingrained in her from childhood.

The narrator's choice of words to describe Rhett's actions towards Scarlett during their marriage also suggests that, when he isn't whisking her up the steps in a drunken passion, he coddles her. Sometimes, he would "[feed] her as if she were a child, [take] the hairbrush from her hand, and [brush] her long dark hair until it snapped and crackled" (793). Here, he cares for her physically in ways Ellen or Mammy might have. Obviously, Scarlett is an adult, but Rhett seems to believe that she desires or requires the same care demanded by a child, or he at least occasionally chooses to express his adoration for her in that way. That same reaction is exhibited when Scarlett wakes from a nightmare and, to comfort her, he "[cradles] her body," providing not only a sense of security but also illuminating the sheer difference in their size: Scarlett is petite enough for Rhett to gather her into him, just as a child is small enough to be transported by an adult. Even though Scarlett is fierce in her business dealings and doesn't let community gossip penetrate her cool façade, she seems to let the intimacy of marriage with Rhett translate to an intimacy shared between mother and daughter when the latter is looking for shelter only the former can provide; she finds the qualities in him she thought her mother would provide forever.

Rhett also embodies those qualities for their daughter, Bonnie, because he feels compelled to make up for the mothering Scarlett fails to provide. Pyron recognizes those traits in Rhett and agrees that he “displays many of the positive virtues associated with women and mothers” (263). Rhett’s odd behavior, positive or not, garners attention from the town and “caused some secret envy among women whose husbands took offspring for granted, long before the children were christened” (Mitchell 826). Scarlett also notices and thinks, “It was all very well for a man to love his child but she felt there was something unmanly in the display of such love. He should be offhand and careless, as other men were” (827). Following this logic, the woman is responsible for publicly loving her children and the man should be proud but aloof. Rhett’s assumption of both roles signals that he doesn’t think Scarlett fulfills her motherly obligations adequately. Bonnie’s reception by Southern society becomes his priority:

From the time the child would walk he took her about with him constantly, in the carriage or in front of his saddle. When he came home from the bank in the afternoon, he took her walking down Peachtree Street, holding her hand, slowing his long strides to her toddling steps, patiently answering her thousand questions. People were always in their front yards or on their porches at sunset and, as Bonnie was such a friendly, pretty child, with her tangle of black curls and her bright blue eyes, few could resist talking to her. Rhett never presumed on these conversations but stood by, exuding fatherly pride and gratification at the notice taken of his daughter. (844)

Just like Mammy laces up Scarlett's corsets or Ellen coaches her on how to deal with men, Rhett tries to train Bonnie to be an acceptable belle while making sure the town notices her.

Melanie rounds out this spectrum not because she bears an impressive number of children but rather because her desire to be a mother is so powerful that she'll nurture anyone who seems to need it. Because she assumes that "universal" mother role, Pyron recognizes Melanie as the "quintessential mother" (230) – the epitome of that performance. According to the narrator, "everyone was like a child to Melanie" (Mitchell 892), so it's not surprising that she treats many of those around her like one. For example, Melanie tends to Scarlett's social reception in Atlanta in a way similar to Ellen's management during her bellehood. When Scarlett and Ashley are caught embracing at the mills, Melanie does not let the rumor ruin Scarlett's remaining reputation. Instead, she "[sticks] by Scarlett's side like a cocklebur" (880) – much like Rhett to Bonnie. With a "fierce 'love-me-love-my-dog' look on her face" (881), she forces town matrons to accept Scarlett into their homes. By the end of the novel, Scarlett looks to Melanie for comfort and wishes she were around to "calm her fears" (764) in the same way she wishes for the support of Ellen, Mammy, or Tara at the novel's end.

Rhett also looks to Melanie for similar support when Scarlett miscarries and Bonnie dies. For him, she is a voice of reason during tragedy. In these moments, a rare glimpse into her perspective offered her by the narrator, "He looked like a damned soul waiting judgment – so like a child in a suddenly hostile world" (892). In that hostile world, she provides stability for him. He clings to her skirts in a way reminiscent of the solace Scarlett found in Ellen's (893). Melanie eventually dies from a miscarriage during

her second pregnancy, dies from trying to be the biological mother she so badly wants to be. If she had recognized her strengths as a figurative rather than literal mother, she could have continued being a mother not only to her son but also to those around her trying to survive the hostile world of reconstruction.

Reconstruction demands a redefining of motherhood suitable to a post-crisis world – a new performance that each individual on the spectrum contributes to, whether by establishing, supporting, or challenging the old model. Scarlett and Melanie, in particular, had to make multiple choices regarding their performances of that role, choices that the public judge and scrutinize and compare to those of others on the spectrum. Scarlett experiences and reflects on that public involvement when she finds herself embarrassed by discussing her pregnancy with Rhett. He, quite pointedly, says, “I knew you were pregnant” (637) and she reacts in a “stunned” (637) manner because “the word itself horrified her. Frank always referred to her pregnancy embarrassingly as ‘your condition,’ Gerald had been wont to say delicately ‘in the family way,’ when he had to mention such matters, and ladies genteelly referred to pregnancy as being ‘in a fix’”(637). Considering these four expressions for discussing motherhood, women can either be honest but inappropriate by using the word *pregnancy*, associate it with a disease or temporary state with the term *condition*, suggest it is a matter of progress by contributing to the family, or, finally, that being pregnant is like being in a difficult or tricky situation. These are the cultural assumptions surrounding motherhood that Mitchell’s female protagonists must reject or accept.



### **“Ladies Should Suffer More”: Scarlett O’Hara’s Performance of Motherhood**

Abandoned at the novel’s close, Scarlett stands alone, pining for Rhett, Melanie, Mammy, and Tara. She also stands separate from those and other “mothers” on the spectrum. Unlike Beatrice Tarleton, she is not obsessed with breeding, nor is she the cold source of comfort that Ellen is. In fact, by providing for the family’s physical needs at a dilapidated Tara and further sustaining them by managing lumber mills in Atlanta, she displays more fatherly, masculine qualities than she does feminine, nurturing qualities. She values the labor of her hands and mind over the labor of childbirth because, in a post-crisis world, the former provides food for the table while the latter produces another mouth to feed. Her engagement in men’s work does fulfill immediate needs but only at the expense of a potential long-term gain: an evolution from belle to businesswoman that also yields offspring built for survival and prosperity despite what future crises the world may throw at them.

Mitchell expresses Scarlett’s attitude towards her mothering role in two ways: the character’s private (or occasionally public) thoughts about the subject and her public treatment of her pregnancies and three children. Whereas Ellen, at least according to the narrator, suppresses her own emotions – passion for her dead teenage love (71), grief over her dead sons (73) – Scarlett’s personal and potent disdain for motherhood expresses itself in the (mis)management of her children. Her thoughts concerning pregnancy, childbirth, babies, and toddlers reveal a woman unwilling to find joy in her biological and marital roles.

She resents motherhood for interfering with two aspects of her life from which she does feel joy: bellehood and the lumber business. After her first child, Wade

Hamilton (Charles's son), is born, she thinks, "She had not wanted him and she resented his coming and, now that he was here, it did not seem possible that he was hers, a part of her" (143). Rather than experiencing a maternal bond with the newborn or pride at bearing a son or feeling grateful that she has Charles's son by whom to remember her late husband, Scarlett is "dazed and sick" (143). In that "daze," she momentarily forgets she has even had a son: "she heard the fretful hungry wail and always – always there was a startled moment when she thought: 'Why, there's a baby in the house!' then she remembered it was her baby. It was all very bewildering" (144). Being "bewildered," "sick," "dazed," and resentful are not sentiments the culture expects from a new mother, particularly before the diagnosis of or treatment for post-partum depression was a possibility; these reactions suggest that Scarlett instead bore Wade out of obligation and duty rather than choice. Her emotional distance from Charles transfers to her child; furthermore, the void created by her lost social life, an impossibility with a child or marriage, makes the newborn son an obstacle in the way of Scarlett's goals.

Because Atlanta's activity contrasts with Tara's stillness, Scarlett has looked forward to flirting and coqueting opportunities when she moves there; however, Wade's squalling as she steps off the train signals the complete disruptions of her plans. She instructs Prissy, his nurse, to give him a sugar-tit because if she held him herself, "he would tug at the ribbons of her bonnet and, no doubt, rumple her dress" (152). She obviously knows that her baby will upset her appearance and identify her as a mother. That role is not her priority in this moment, and she doubts it will ever be: "'maybe I'll learn about babies some time', she [thinks] irritably [. . .] 'but I'm never going to like fooling with them'" (152). Instead, she'll fool with her clothing and with men's hearts

instead, while nurses and mammies tend to her children. Because she wants so desperately to arrive in the city as a belle when Prissy calms Wade, “with quiet restored and with the new sights that met her eyes, [her] spirits began to rise a little” (153). Her range of thoughts in this moment – that motherhood is something she’ll figure out later and right now she prefers to appear attractive to potential suitors rather than hold her son – suggests that beneath her black widow’s garb and in spite of Wade’s cries, she still considers herself a belle. In “The Bad Little Girl of the Good Old Days: Gender, Sex, and the Southern Social Order,” Anne Jones supports this argument with her claim that Scarlett doesn’t want to fool with children because “she does not like being reminded of her own ‘childish’ needs and, when reminded, she does not like the idea of anyone else’s competing with her for a ‘haven’” (110). Her need for attention from men or anyone else is childish; her haven is the space in which she performs as a desirable belle. Just as she wants to play the belle and garner attention from men, children want attention from their parents. Jones’s claims are echoed by Betina Entzminger’s examination of Scarlett’s transformation from belle to businesswoman, *The Belle Gone Bad*. Entzminger suggests that the qualities Scarlett mastered in bellehood – “deceitfulness, shrewdness, manipulateness, and superficiality – are the very traits that enable her to survive in the fallen South” (106). Because that survival relies heavily on her not letting her children’s squalls interfere with catching a new husband or running a business, she uses those same traits to conceal motherhood and continue coquetting.

When Scarlett feels further robbed of the Atlanta social life she has anticipated, she blames the code of conduct she must follow as a mother and widow. While sitting on

the sidelines of a bazaar organized to raise money for the Cause, Scarlett laments her confinement to merely watching other young girls with beaux:

For a brief moment she considered the unfairness of it all. How short was the time for fun, for pretty clothes, for dancing, for coquetting! Only a few, too few years! Then you married and wore dull-colored dresses, and had babies that ruined your waist line and sat in corners at dances with other sober matrons and only emerged to dance with your husband or an old gentleman who stepped on your feet.

(Mitchell 180)

Just as a crying Wade may ruffle her bonnet, babies only make her less attractive to men and thus less able to perform as a belle. These private thoughts contrast with the assumption of Melanie and others that Scarlett is, or at least should be, “content with her lot” (179) of supporting the Cause and raising the child of a fallen Southern soldier. Any desire she might have had to garner the attention of young men should have been squashed by Charles’s death and Wade’s birth. Years later, when she is married to Rhett and thus financially secure, she returns to fretting over her waist that has been expanded by three children: “Twenty inches! She groan[s] aloud. That was what having babies did to your figure! Her waist was as large as Aunt Pitty’s, as large as Mammy’s” (828). Comparing her post-pregnancy body to two childless, husbandless women suggests that Scarlett perceives her changed shape to signify undesirability to men and an end to her youth.

At the bazaar, Rhett Butler leads Scarlett onto the dance floor, moving her farther away from her role and responsibilities as mother. She could not have become a mother and widow without a man, so it seems logical that she cannot shake loose those chains

without a man. Under the guise of contributing money to the Cause, Rhett bids on Scarlett during a ladies auction; because his boldness succeeds, they spend the evening dancing to the tune of appalled gasps and whispers from matrons. Her participation in this challenge to cultural norms frees her from any lingering sense of maturity that motherhood may have induced:

Scarlett was back again where she had been before she married Charles and it was as if she had never married him, never felt the shock of his death, never borne Wade. War and marriage and childbirth had passed over her without touching any deep chord within her and she was unchanged. She had a child but he was cared for so well by the others in the red-brick house she could almost forget him. (219)

In this scenario, her little boy becomes equivalent to the black garb she wears and her new surname – symbols of long-past life events that have socially constructed value but no personal worth to her. She “wears” the roles to please the public but doesn’t experience the changes or sentiments they should represent in this culture. There seems to be no pull or bond that attaches mother to child. Similarly, she doesn’t grieve for Charles or feel like Mrs. Hamilton because she longs to remain single and an O’Hara (143). She wears the widowed mother costume but performs as a belle. Years later, a visibly protruding womb marks Scarlett as one who shouldn’t be riding in carriages with any man other than her husband; frustrated by such constraint, she “impatiently” (691) thinks, “if only I could get this baby over and done with [. . .] then I could ride with [Rhett] every day and we could talk” (691). Her pregnancy interrupts and delays her performance of the youthful role she covets.

She is able to remove that resented costume only because the war so drastically changes the social scene. That change, according to Louis Rubin in his article “Scarlett O’Hara and the Two Quentin Compsons,” “liberate[s] her from the constriction of the Southern Lady role” (96), a role with which she is “deeply dissatisfied” (96). That liberation is illuminated by the narrator’s observation that “in these exciting days [Scarlett’s] widowhood and her motherhood weighed less heavily upon her than ever before. Between hospital duties in the day time and parties at night, she hardly ever saw Wade. Sometimes she actually forgot, for long stretches, that she had a child” (Mitchell 307). Again, Wade is relegated to the recesses of her thoughts because nursing wounded soldiers and socializing provide opportunities to flirt and feel young again. Rather than experiencing those days as somber or depressing, Scarlett believes them to be exciting because she can “rewrite” the roles thrust upon her from childhood.

She soon changes her tune, however, when the war reaches Atlanta and survival, rather than coquetting, becomes a priority; now, Melanie’s pregnancy, rather than her own status as mother, prevents Scarlett from escaping the siege. Melanie is so weak that Dr. Meade insists that she stay in Atlanta until her baby comes and that Scarlett stay with her (316). Melanie goes into labor as the Yankees approach, and Scarlett thinks, “of all the days in the world, Melanie had to pick this day to have the baby!” (339). By having Scarlett suggest that Melanie has a choice in the matter, Mitchell foreshadows Scarlett’s subsequent reluctant midwife performance. Her reluctance stems from her ignorance of the process, so she “trie[s] to think of all the things Mammy and Ellen had done for her when Wade was born but the merciful blurring of the childbirth pains obscured almost everything in mist” (352). In other words, except for the pain, Scarlett did not feel like an

active participant in her son's birth; instead, the women around her orchestrated the entire procedure, leaving Scarlett free to see herself as unchanged. Other women of the time probably experienced the same "merciful blurring," but they also most likely participated in conversations about obstetrics that were common among married women (114).

Scarlett, chasing her youth, now curses her escape from such discussions because "if only she had been more interested in such matters she'd know whether Melanie was taking a long time or not" (353). Babies had interfered with bellehood, but in this circumstance bellehood interferes with babies. The two divergent roles converge to obstruct Scarlett's chances to escape Atlanta safely.

Instead of being grateful for the survival of Melanie and her child, Scarlett makes urgent the transporting of the brood to safety at Tara and privately deplores being responsible for so many others. She does not see herself as the mother these others need right now, but rather fantasizes that all would be well

if only she could reach the kind arms of Tara and Ellen and lay down her burdens, far too heavy for her young shoulders – the dying woman, the fading baby, her own hungry little boy, the frightened negro, all looking to her for strength, for guidance, all reading in her straight back courage she did not possess and strength which had long since failed. (381)

She longs for comfort from her "mothers" while others turn to her for the same reason.

Melanie and the baby are too weak to protest or make demands and Prissy must accompany her mistress, so Scarlett's reactions to Wade's needs best reflect the burden she perceives in her literal and figurative role as mother: "Why had God invented children, she thought savagely as she turned her ankle cruelly on the dark road – useless,

crying nuisances they were, always demanding care, always in the way” (385). In the same way that Ellen succumbs to burdens of war that go beyond nursing her sick daughters, Scarlett tires from physically bearing a child but also bearing other “children” to safety. When she thinks about Wade, “in her exhaustion, there was no room for compassion for the frightened child [. . .] only a weariness that she had borne him, only a tired wonder that she had ever married Charles Hamilton” (385). That marriage sent her to Atlanta to stay with her sister-in-law and thus forced her later to evacuate the city, dependents in tow. Without those dependents, her fight to survive could not possibly be as treacherous.

When she arrives at Tara and surveys the remaining inhabitants, her thoughts turn again to the necessity of children. Pork, Gerald’s body servant, tells her that his wife has just had a child, and she thinks to herself, “babies, babies, babies. Why did God make so many babies? But no, God didn’t make them. Stupid people made them” (390). In Scarlett’s mind, babies are no longer a valued product of marriage but have become creations by “stupid people” that strain her resources. Moments before, she was questioning God’s invention of children, but now that she has put the responsibility on mortals, she also suggests that babies are not miracles or gifts to be cherished. That idea is reinforced by her changing perception of Wade, who she “hardly thought of [. . .] as a person” because he is now “only another worry, another mouth to feed” (410). Were she to fulfill traditional maternal expectations and think of her son as a person, she risks becoming too focused on his emotional well-being and less focused on providing food, thus preventing her survival and the survival of Tara.



After her acquisition of profitable lumber mills upon her return to post-war Atlanta, Scarlett becomes obsessed with chasing financial security and continues to reject motherhood in favor of that pursuit, much to the chagrin of her second husband, Frank Kennedy. Despite how “outspoken” (601) about avoiding pregnancy she is in their marriage, he “knew that many women said they didn’t want babies but that was all foolishness and fear. If Scarlett had a baby, she would love it and be content to stay home and tend to it like other women. Then she would be forced to sell the mill [. . .]” (601). Following Frank’s line of thinking, the reader sees the logic of cultural norms: if Scarlett engages in the most womanly of acts, then she will act like a woman instead of a man; thus, Frank’s marriage will be more pleasant because “a baby would make her happy and would take her mind off things she had no business fooling with” (601). This masculine interpretation of her actions suggests that, in the eyes of society, a woman’s happiness correlates to the labor of pregnancy, not the labor of the mind or hands. Scarlett, however, would rather manage her businesses than bother with babies. They do, however, eventually have a child, and when Frank is killed, Scarlett realizes that their child, Ella, is the only way she ever gave him “any real happiness” (764). In this line of thought, she inverts Frank’s logic turning the theory that a baby means happiness back on him.

Scarlett evolves, then, from belle to businesswoman, not from belle to mother or matron; however, even though the business is her priority, reconstructing the Old South is her society’s priority and that requires population growth. Scarlett puts her own needs, rooted in a fear of starvation and death, before her culture’s when she decides to produce lumber rather than future gentlemen or ladies:

What a mess it was to try to run a business and have a baby too! “I’ll never have another one,” she decided firmly. “I’m not going to be like other women and have a baby every year. Good Lord, that would mean six months out of the year when I’d have to be away from the mills! And I see now I can’t afford to be away from them even one day. [. . .]” Her mind was made up. This was her last child. The mills were far more important.<sup>3</sup> (694)

Scarlett contributes to Reconstruction by orchestrating the transformation of raw wood into useful lumber. The mills become a type of womb, in this sense, but they aren’t the culturally sanctioned womb a woman should concern herself; so, when she decides she cannot afford to be confined at home, she also decides that society *can* afford to lose a mother.

That decision is a silent one, shared only with the reader, but Scarlett’s public behavior towards her children implicitly reveals her private frustrations with motherhood. On her wedding night with Charles, she refuses to consummate the marriage, despite the sense of urgency created by the war. She doesn’t seem afraid or confused, but rather annoyed with the situation when she shrieks at him, “‘I’ll scream out loud if you come near me. I will! I will – at the top of my voice! Get away from me! Don’t you dare touch me!’” (141). In terms of plot, the reader knows, her hesitations stem from her love for Ashley, but those hesitations also makes clear that she doesn’t see the need to fulfill her role as wife, which of course means that she cannot become a mother. By refusing her husband, she refuses children.

Despite her reluctance in that scene, Wade is eventually conceived and born. Scarlett’s body quickly recovers, as if it senses and adapts to her private aversion to

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<sup>3</sup> Narrator’s commentary with Scarlett’s thoughts in quotations

motherhood. Mitchell devotes only a single sentence to Scarlett's pregnancy and labor: "she carried the child through its time with a minimum of discomfort, bore him with little distress and recovered so quickly that Mammy told her privately it was downright common – ladies should suffer more" (143). Ladies suffer for a greater good or personal growth, but Scarlett bears her child out of obligation; she doesn't need to suffer because she doesn't want Wade and thus the pains of labor would be lost on her. She also heals "disgracefully" (143) fast, as if childbirth has not drained her of the proper amount of energy for a Southern lady; at this moment, labor would presumably be the hardest thing Scarlett will face in her life and the most physically demanding situation women of her station (i.e. not "common") are expected to endure. Her speedy recovery here thus foreshadows that she'll come through the labor of picking cotton and tending crops stronger than before because her body and spirit are made for whatever kind of labor survival takes. When she shifts her energy from cotton to lumber in Atlanta, she moves from the fields to an office, from physical to mental exertion. So the strength she develops in extreme poverty allows her easily to bear her second child because "the healthy vigor which had carried her through the hard days at Tara stood her in good stead now, and within two weeks of Ella Lorena's birth she was strong enough to sit and chafe at her inactivity. In three weeks she was up, declaring she had to see the mills" (696). Unlike other women who can "naturally" focus on their newborns and healing, Scarlett's mind pressures her body not to rest too long because rest does not create profit or sustain life.

She expects those around her to be just as strong, including her children, and her actions as a mother of older children display a complete disregard for their emotional

well-being. Instead of coddling or nurturing Wade, she instructs him either to be mature or leave her alone. He is “like a caged, frightened rabbit” (309-10) during Melanie’s labor, but rather than explaining to him what is happening, she yells, “Go play in the back yard, Wade Hamilton!” (310). By following her order and playing outside, Wade hurts himself and looks to his mother for comfort, but she ignores him with “Hush! Hush! Hush! Or I’ll spank you” (351). Even in the best of circumstances, a mother should provide emotional and physical comfort, but Scarlett fails to do either for a toddler who, living through war and fatherlessness, requires extra nurturing.

Her ignorance about children’s needs and her lack of desire to interact with them are most evident in her most frequent instructions to Wade. When the family flees Atlanta, when food is scarce at Tara, and when Yankees threaten that home, she wants him to “be a little man” (385, 411, 440), even though he has no male role model. Still, she wants him to grow up and stop reacting as a child reacts. Scarlett knows how to deal with men and what to expect from them, but she does not possess that same knowledge of children. Nor does she exhibit a desire to learn.

These private and public reactions towards children collide in a dramatic moment when her performance of motherhood, no matter how rehearsed and unnatural for her, wards off the Yankees and destruction. Events force Scarlett to re-examine her interpretation of that role and how it aligns with Ellen’s and Southern society’s examples. Just a few scenes before Yankees descend on the house, Scarlett has a realization about those examples:

Nothing her mother had taught her was of any value whatsoever now and

Scarlett’s heart was sore and puzzled. It did not occur to her that Ellen could not

have foreseen the collapse of the civilization in which she raised her daughters, could not have anticipated the disappearing of the places in society for which she trained them so well. [. . .] Scarlett thought in despair: “nothing, no, nothing she taught me is of any help to me! What good will kindness do me now? What value is gentleness? Better that I’d learned to plow or chop cotton like a ducky. Oh, Mother, you were wrong!” [. . .] and [Scarlett] changed swiftly to meet this new world for which she was not prepared. (413)

Among what disappears for Scarlett is her concept of a mother. Ellen trained her daughters to interact with beaux and lead prayers, but she did not teach them how to care for small children without the help of nurses or when physical safety is not guaranteed. Poverty and danger define Scarlett’s new world. Therefore, she must swiftly change how she mothers in order to survive and ensure her offspring’s survival.

She greets the Yankee army at Tara’s front door – standing defiantly with a baby on her hip and a toddler clinging to her skirts – a performance of motherhood that dares the men to deface it. Melanie’s infant son becomes a prop that allows her to hide the plantation’s only money when she shoves her wallet into his diaper (438). Wade, “like a baby rabbit in a trap” (439), buries himself in her skirts – finding comfort in her costume in the way Scarlett was once consoled by Ellen’s and as Rhett will later seek that same comfort in Melanie’s skirts (439). The children cling to her, but she does not cling to them: the baby is a hiding place and Wade is a nuisance. Her appearance suggests that she is a woman trying to comfort her family while their home is destroyed; in reality, she seeks to protect her home while her family serve as obstacles to attaining that goal.

When the Yankees ransack Tara in this scene, the domestic sphere that Ellen created and managed is destroyed; again, the place in which she taught her girls to behave no longer looks the way it did before the war. As the Yankees “[swarm] through the house, [push] roughly past [Scarlett] up the stairs, [drag] furniture onto the front porch, [run] bayonets and knives into upholstery and [dig] inside for concealed valuables” (440), that place crumbles and cracks open, allowing Scarlett to reinterpret Tara. She begins to form that revised interpretation when she pulls down Ellen’s green velvet curtains and sews them into a dress that she wears that to lure tax money for Tara from Rhett. Mammy’s protests that “Miss Ellen set gret sto’ by dem po’teers an [she] ain’ ‘tendin’ ter have [Scarlett] muss dem up dat way” (513) are invalid in a world where Ellen no longer exists. Curtains and furniture, once symbols of wealth and a woman’s domestic talents, are now fodder for the Yankees and props for Scarlett’s revised performance of motherhood.

Her transformation of those curtains for her own purposes is a conscious choice – one that she probably couldn’t have made if the Yankees had not forcibly taken Ellen’s gold thimble from her, thus breaking the strong bond between mother and daughter embodied in that accessory. Watching one of the soldiers hold the thimble in his hand, Scarlett remembers what it looked like in Ellen’s possession, “how often she had seen it gleaming in and out of Ellen’s fancy work. The sight of it brought back too many hurting memories of the slender hand which had worn it” (443). Without that loss brought on by an external force beyond her power, Scarlett would not have been able to (re)create Ellen’s curtains for her own purposes. When she watches the thimble go, she lets some of her attachment to her mother’s way of mothering go with it.

In the same breath, she forges a small connection between her and her son that is also transmitted through a material object. The soldiers threaten to take Charles's sword that has been promised to Wade as a testament to his father's service to the Cause. The sword is a possession that Wade cherishes; he is "very proud of it and often climbed upon the table beneath where it hung to pat it" (441). Wade doesn't need the sword for survival, so this is one of the first and only times we see Scarlett expend energy on mothering him when his physical safety is not threatened. She "could endure seeing her own possessions going out of the house in hateful alien hands but not this – not her little boy's pride" (441). She wants to secure for him a positive memory of his father, like the memories that the thimble or curtains hold for her. Eventually, Wade will have to re-interpret that sword and what it stands for; he will have to figure out what being a man means, just as Scarlett's perception of motherhood is actively being challenged. For now, she (or, more specifically, her skirts) shields him from that trauma.

When Scarlett releases the thimble and repurposes the curtains, she gradually releases her figurative grip on her mother's skirts. Each time she imagines how her mother would handle a situation or react to her actions, and then dismisses those thoughts, she further separates herself from Ellen on the motherhood spectrum. For example, as Scarlett watches the defeated Southerners dance at a ball, she thinks to herself:

"Even though they're poor, they still feel like ladies and I don't. The silly fools don't seem to realize that you can't be a lady without money!" Even in this flash

of revelation, she realized vaguely that, foolish though they seemed, theirs was the right attitude. Ellen would have thought so. This disturbed her.<sup>4</sup> (570)

If being a lady means raising children in Ellen's fashion, then Scarlett feels she cannot follow in those footsteps until she has financial security. In her hierarchy of needs, food and shelter are prioritized over manners and customs. This logic can also be applied to her actions as mother: if Wade doesn't have shoes, why does it matter if he knows how to be a Southern gentleman or not? She knows Ellen would never let such primal needs outweigh decorum because "no depth of poverty could ever have made Ellen feel ashamed" (571) or drive her to neglect her duties as woman and mother. As Scarlett moves farther away from the traditional interpretation of those roles and begins to create her own narrative for female experience, she has to negotiate with Ellen's memory.

Eventually, she engages less and less in that negotiation process as her evolution continues. After lying to a potential lumber customer, she thinks about Ellen's reaction to that behavior: "Momentarily, Scarlett cringed as she pictured the look on her mother's face. And then the picture faded, blotted out by an impulse, hard, unscrupulous and greedy, which had been born in the lean days at Tara and was now strengthened by the present uncertainty of life" (619). Her current dire circumstances blot out her mother's image because she feels she does not have the luxury of managing a prosperous Tara and being married to a wealthy planter. Ellen is never forced to choose ladyhood and motherhood over survival; her performance is rote and robotic, established by women who live in similar luxury. After conjuring and dismissing her mother's image in this moment, Scarlett "never again thought of Ellen in connection with her business practices, never again regretted any means she used to take trade away from lumber dealers" (620).

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<sup>4</sup> Scarlett's thoughts in quotations followed by the narrator's commentary.



In this new world, where women have to be different kinds of mothers and different kinds of ladies, Scarlett cannot afford to dwell on how far she deviates from her mother's example.

Before her death, we see Ellen herself loosening her grip on her daughter, for the greater good of the Cause. When Scarlett visits Tara, Ellen admits that she wants her to stay, but "mustn't be selfish and keep [her there] when [she is] needed to nurse in Atlanta" (220). Her desire as a mother to keep her child close is inhibited by her duty as a woman to support the South. She has to release Scarlett so that her daughter can also fulfill unique responsibilities created by war. Scarlett feels guilty that "it was the dancing and the beaux which drew her back to Atlanta and not the service of the Confederacy" (220) but reassures Ellen that "[she'll] always be [her] little girl" (220). Both women perform for the other: the unselfish and sacrificing mother who really wants to keep her daughter for herself and the dutiful daughter who deceptively conceals her self-indulgence. These façades inhibit honest conversation about the crisis these women face, so, rather than accept the challenge together, Scarlett has to take Ellen's example and twist it for her own purposes.

Scarlett needs to negotiate not only her relationship with Ellen, but also relationships with other mothers on my spectrum; she has either to adapt to their space or claim her own. Mothering provides an opportunity for bonding among women, one which Scarlett does not pursue. When Melanie goes into labor, Scarlett "fervently [wishes] she had paid more attention to the whispered conversations of matrons on the subject of childbirth" (353). Instead of being interested in that advice, she had dwelt on activities from which motherhood barred her, such as flirting and wearing pretty dresses. So, just

as she declares financial independence, so also does she ostracize herself from other mothers and thus doesn't receive valuable information about that role.

Despite Scarlett's private and public attitude towards motherhood and rejection of Ellen and other women's interpretation of that role, she still must endure the physical bearing of children unless she can control her husbands' sexual desires and expectations. Ellen warned her that marriage, and everything that came with it, "was something women must bear with dignity and fortitude" (215), and she later reflects that her mother was right because

Charles had awakened no idea of what passion might be or tenderness or true intimacy of body and spirit [. . .] all that passion meant to her was servitude to inexplicable male madness and, unshared by females, a painful and embarrassing process that led inevitably to the still more painful process of childbirth. (215)

In other words, she fulfills her terms of servitude as a wife when she has sex with her husband, but does not experience love or passion for him. She does, however, ache for Ashley Wilkes – the man she married Charles Hamilton to spite and Frank Kennedy to help support. Because Ashley is married to Melanie, and thus forbidden, Scarlett enacts an elaborate imaginary love affair with him in her mind, living off the brief moments they touch or even speak. She resigns herself to the fact that he cannot leave Melanie but is sustained by her imagination because "her love for Ashley was something different, having nothing to do with passion or marriage, something sacred and breath-takingly beautiful, an emotion that grew stealthily through the long days of her enforced silence" (215). She believes that she doesn't need to be physically intimate with Ashley because her concept of such passion is founded on force, embarrassment, and unavoidable

pregnancy. Her obsession with Ashley is an escape from motherhood: he becomes a celibate lover whom she can desire without the consequence of children.

When Scarlett finally marries Rhett Butler, however, her ideas about passion, and thus motherhood, begin to change; this transformation is, however, not immediate. Their first child, Bonnie, is not welcomed by Scarlett. When Dr. Meade tells her that she is pregnant, “it was with real hate in her eyes that she stormed into her bedroom at twilight and told Rhett that she was going to have a baby” (819). She yells, “you know I don’t want any more children! I never wanted any at all. Every time things are going right with me I have to have a baby. Oh, don’t sit there and laugh! You don’t want it either” (820). She then threatens to have an abortion, to which he replies, “You’ll have your baby, Scarlett, if I have to handcuff you to my wrist for the next nine months” (820). He understands what a deadly procedure she proposes, but Scarlett seems concerned only with gaining back control over her body and in her marriage. Because she “couldn’t handle Rhett as she had Frank” (828), she realizes her marginalized position in the decision to have children with him. An abortion would further her independence and consequently her evolution: if men control procreation in marriage, opting for an abortion becomes a masculine move for Scarlett to make.

After Bonnie’s birth, her physical intimacy with Rhett begins to interfere not only with her desire to cease having children but also her imaginary affair with Ashley. She convinces herself that “the thought of her lying in Rhett’s arms roused a fury in [Ashley] that she did not think possible” (830). She admits that she doesn’t feel the same fury only because of her “knowledge that his relations with Melanie were, necessarily, those of brother and sister” (830). Moreover, “Rhett’s embraces coarsened her, brutalized her!”

(830) and resulted in children. Thus, because she thinks “how sweet and romantic it would be for [her and Ashley] both to be physically true to each other, even though married to other people” (830), she bans Rhett from her bedroom. Again, her internal obsession with Ashley dovetails with her rejection of motherhood: she can love him without fear of reproducing.

On a night when Rhett’s embraces are meant to “coarsen” and “brutalize” her so that her fantasy of Ashley will be erased from her mind, genuine passion awakens in Scarlett, and, with it, her maternal switch seems to flip. A drunk and frustrated Rhett sweeps her upstairs to prove that she cannot deny him and that her symbolic relationship with Ashley is not an adequate replacement for a physical one with him (871). When Dr. Meade diagnoses her next pregnancy, she realizes, “a child is coming from those moments of high rapture [. . .] and for the first time she was glad she was going to have a child” (887). The male “passion” she resented when married to Charles and Frank has been converted, by Rhett, into a reciprocal emotion strong enough to change Scarlett’s attitude towards motherhood. Additionally, she “[has] the leisure to devote to a baby and the money to smooth his path” (887) now, so the financial burden of parenting that she has previously loathed is now nonexistent.

Her new attitude towards this child is tainted by Rhett’s acute observation of her behavior towards her other children. He claims that he dominates Bonnie’s rearing because Scarlett is a “damned poor manager” (837) and she’s “wrecked whatever chances Ella and Wade had” (837). With those words from her husband, she begins to realize the consequences of her inadequate performance of motherhood that performance is as perceived by her culture. When Rhett travels with Bonnie, Scarlett

trie[s] to fill in some of the empty hours with [Wade and Ella]. But it was no use. Rhett's words and the children's reactions opened her eyes to a startling, a galling truth. During the babyhood of each child she had been too busy, too worried with money matters, too sharp and easily vexed, to win either their confidence or affection. And now, it was either too late or she did not have the patience or the wisdom to penetrate their small secretive hearts. (886)

She does not want to repeat this cycle with her new child; babies are pliable, but Wade and Ella have matured too much in the stifling atmosphere that Scarlett created for them to make a second chance possible. This realization comes too late, however, because she miscarries and loses her chance to change the happily expected child's history. The physical weakness she had never before succumbed to during pregnancy and labor now overcomes her because she is filled with emotions at losing this child. She thinks, "how easy it was to have a child and how painful not to have one! Strange, what a pang it had been even in her pain, to know that she would not have this child" (891). Because she has essentially lost three children, and because Rhett is Bonnie's primary nurturer, she has no reason to continue performing as a mother.

The alternative effort that has shaped that performance, she now sees, had been expended mostly on her mills, which "had been her darlings, her pride, the fruit of her small grasping hands [. . .] she had fought and schemed and nursed them through the dark times [. . .]" (904). Using the words "darlings," "pride," "fruit," and "nursed" suggests that Scarlett has viewed the mills as her children. They are her legacy, but now that she has Rhett, she doesn't need the money they produce and wishes to turn her energy towards her actual children.

Scarlett's interpretation of motherhood is completed when Bonnie dies suddenly, and she longs to perform her part in the mother-father dynamic. The strained relationship that could have been salvaged if not for her miscarriage is destroyed when the final marital connection between Rhett and Scarlett is removed:

Rhett was her husband and between them there was the unbreakable bond of two people who have shared the same bed, begotten and borne a loved child and seen that child, too soon, laid away in the dark. Only in the arms of the father of that child could she find comfort, in the exchange of memories and grief that might hurt at first but would help to heal. (926)

That bond is unfortunately breakable because she, absent from Bonnie's life, has chosen not to forge it to begin with. Rhett has transferred the comfort he might have given Scarlett to Bonnie because Bonnie is receptive and her mother inattentive. Scarlett's performance as mother has resulted in neglect not just of her children but also her marriage, thus elevating Rhett's performance as father and husband.

Too wrapped up in her own evolution from belle to businesswoman, too concerned with Ellen's shadow, and too late in recognizing her weaknesses as a mother, Scarlett neglects to instill in her offspring the same spirit and drive that have seen her through crisis. In them, she had an opportunity to push back against society because, as suggested by Adrienne Rich, a mother is responsible for indoctrinating her children for patriarchy. Rich explains

for, much as she should act as the coequal provider or so-called matriarch within her own family, every mother must deliver his children over within a few years of their birth to the patriarchal system of education, of law, of religion, of sexual

codes; she is, in fact, expected to prepare them to enter that system without rebelliousness or “maladjustment” and to perpetuate it in their own adult lives.

Patriarchy depends on the mother to act as a conservative influence, imprinting future adults with the patriarchal values even in those early years when the mother-child relationship might seem most individual and private. (61)

She does not teach Ella the importance of managing finances or running a business, and she neglects to teach Wade how to farm crops or chop wood. Rather than manipulate the system, she feeds it because, in her mind, protecting her children from immediate danger should be her urgent concern. She does not realize that by focusing too much on the present, she loses sight of a possible future – a future that Ellen did not prepare her for and now she is leaving her children just as ill-equipped for. The world she imagines for her children is not one of

hate and uncertainty, of bitterness and violence lurking just below the surface, of poverty and grinding hardships and insecurity. She never wanted children of hers to know what all this was like. She wanted a secure and well-ordered world in which she could look forward and know there was a safe future ahead for them, a world where her children would know only softness and warmth and good clothes and fine food. (Mitchell 608)

Try as she might to create a secure world, Scarlett cannot control the external forces of politics and war. That realm is off-limits to a woman. The domain that society reserves for her is motherhood, but instead of using that as a platform to prepare her children to meet successfully whatever world they grow into, she rejects her potential in their lives. Her evolution stops and the age-old cultural cycle re-starts.

### **If by Emotional Grit Alone: Melanie Wilkes's Performance of Motherhood**

Scarlett fights war and the subsequent poverty of war's effects for her life; she focuses her energy on amassing a fortune large enough to protect her from future crisis. Melanie, on the other hand, concentrates on fighting those same forces by maintaining the Old Southern family structure and modeling past mothers such as Ellen O'Hara and Beatrice Tarleton. She is, in the words of Molly Haskell, author of *Frankly, My Dear*, the "grand dame of the Confederate memorial movement" (221). Scarlett successfully saves herself but not future generations whereas Melanie kills herself trying to bear children who will reconstruct the antebellum world she cherishes. She leaves her only son to be raised by the same patriarchal forces that instigated war; thus, she vacates her place on the spectrum of motherhood and gives up her chance to influence what that role will look like in the New South.

The war is a very real part of her adult life, but Melanie is an unwilling participant in that reality, seemingly content with convincing herself that the world is stable, complete, and sufficient even when the landscape around her is drastically changing. The narrator explains that this innocence is a part of Melanie's nature. She

had the face of a sheltered child who had never known anything but simplicity and kindness, truth and love, a child who had never looked upon harshness or evil and would not recognize them if she saw them [ . . . ] she always saw the best in everyone and remarked kindly upon it. There was no servant so stupid that she did not find some redeeming trait of loyalty and kind-heartedness, no girl so ugly and disagreeable that she could not discover grace of form or nobility of character in



her, and no man so worthless or so boring that she did not view him in the light of his possibilities rather than his actualities. (162-3)

This desire to see the potential in everyone or every situation would be Melanie's eventual downfall. By comparing an adult woman to a child, the narrator suggests that Melanie embodies an innocence that should eventually be absent in adulthood. For Melanie, not even war and death trigger a mature transformation that would compel her to save her energy for personal survival rather than childbearing. Just as she looks for the possibilities within others, she searches for that same elusive potential in herself.

The narrator explains that Melanie's innocent attitude is, in part, a product of societal pressure placed on women to "make those about them feel at ease and pleased with themselves. It was this happy feminine conspiracy which made Southern society so pleasant" (163). Melanie's role in that pleasantry is to ignore life's unpleasant mess, including warnings against pregnancy from doctors or Scarlett's threat to her marriage to Ashley. Other belles recognize Scarlett's inappropriate pursuits, but Melanie wants to embrace her as a new friend and eventual sister-in-law, rather than expressing insecurity or jealousy. She maintains a fierce loyalty to Scarlett even after the town is abuzz with gossip about a private embrace between Melanie's husband and the woman she perceives as friend and family. Just as she won't admit to the manipulation that could destroy her marriage, Melanie doesn't want to see the potential dangers of her having children.

Those dangers do not outweigh her desire for a large family, which she frankly and frequently expresses to Scarlett and the reader. After announcing the news of her first pregnancy, she is already dreaming about the "dozen" others she wants (274). At times, she expresses her maternal desire as desperation. When she suggests, "it would be better

to have a son even if he did get killed than to never have one” (257), Melanie places more value on giving birth to a child than mothering a child. As long as she can raise him to be a gentlemen and soldier, then her mothering career will be complete. Her confession has a morbid undertone that emphasizes her longing to have a baby without thinking about the consequences – for that child or herself.

She seems to know that she shouldn’t be expressing such desires and follows up this morbid statement with, “Oh, Scarlett, I want a baby so bad! I know you think I’m horrid to say it right out, but it’s true” (257). Vocalizing her desire is what she labels as horrid, not her willingness to have a child even if he should eventually die in war. She makes a similar morally complex compromise with reality after giving birth to Beau when she and Scarlett learn that Ashley may be dead. She says aloud, “at least – I’ve got his baby” (276), a sympathy-eliciting statement that also underscores the importance she places on having a child. As long as she has Beau, she can face losing her spouse. Melanie isn’t prioritizing her son’s life over Ashley’s in this moment, but she does articulate her own priorities: a baby seems to be enough comfort to her amidst the harsh losses of war.

Despite barely surviving Beau’s birth, Melanie prioritizes a second child over her health. She desires a daughter of her own after seeing Scarlett through her third labor:

I wouldn’t really want Scarlett’s baby but – but I would so like a baby of my own! [ . . . ] But Dr. Meade had never change[d] his opinion on that subject. And though she was quite willing to risk her life for another child, Ashley would not hear of it. A daughter. How Ashley would love a daughter! A daughter! Mercy!” (821)

If not for Ashley's restraint then, Melanie would try to expand their family rather than be content with her lot. At a time when abstinence, the only reliable birth control, can not be entirely up to the woman in a marriage, most readers would assume that Melanie's gratitude that her husband doesn't jeopardize her life in exchange for sex or more children. When she does conceive for the second time, the reader thus reasonably assumes that the pregnancy is Melanie's idea rather than a product of force or coercion on Ashley's part.

She can bluntly acknowledge wanting a child and convince her husband to try for another, it seems, but shame surrounds her in scenes to do with the actual conception and bearing of a child. During Ashley's Christmas furlough, we see from Scarlett's perspective Melanie's quiet embarrassment at going into a bedroom alone with Ashley: her "cheeks were suddenly crimson and she was trembling. Her eyes were on the carpet and, though she seemed overcome with some frightening emotion, she seemed shyly happy" (264). She doesn't carry herself into the room with a cool dignity but instead blushes and doesn't even "look up when Ashley open[s] the door, but [speeds] inside" (264). She displays similar body language when she tells Scarlett about her pregnancy, "her eyes shining with joy, her head ducked with embarrassed pride" (274). Her joyful eyes contradict the shame she feels at revealing her condition – a pride she seems ashamed to display. In the same scene, she debates how to inform Ashley and thinks, "it would be so embarrassing if I could tell him" (275). Although the pregnancy makes clear Melanie's intimacy with her husband, discussing her pregnancy with the child's father obviously fazes her. Scarlett displays similar hesitation surrounding that topic, presumably because her culture considers such talk inappropriate, but she hedges

primarily when in the company of men who are not her husband, such as Rhett. Melanie, on the other hand, dithers when discussing her pregnancy with her sister-in-law and her husband; she doesn't consider the intimacy of those familial relations compelling enough to violate cultural mores.

Her unwillingness to voice biological facts suggests that Melanie will not recognize the limitations of her body, either. Those limitations are a part of her character, recognized not just by the narrator but also by Scarlett and others. When Melanie first comes up in conversation, pages before she even appears on the scene, Scarlett "recall[s] with contempt [her] thin childish figure" (42). Granted, Scarlett holds a grudge against her as Ashley's betrothed, but we hear the narrator echo the same description after Melanie announces her intention for a large family, observing that "Melanie might want children but she certainly did not have the figure for bearing them. She was hardly taller than a twelve-year-old child, her hips were as narrow as a child's and her breasts were very flat" (258). Because her body is not that of a woman but a child, the narrator makes clear, Melanie will not easily be able to bear or to nurse a baby.

Dr. Meade expresses similar concerns about possible difficulties in labor. He warns Melanie not to attempt fleeing Atlanta before the baby comes and emphasizes that she shouldn't even be seeking shelter in the cellar during cannon fire because too much movement could cause complications (315). In the back country, midwives, such as the Tara slave Dilcey, would have been commonplace; even Ellen serves as midwife for Emmie Slattery's baby. Even though Adrienne Rich warns that a patriarchal technique for controlling women is to discredit midwives and favor doctors, Dr. Meade's warnings that Melanie needs to be in close proximity to medical professionals seems authentic, a

product of science, not ideology. His advice stems from genuine concern for Melanie and reflects no judgment regarding women more broadly or back-country birthing practices. As the due date approaches, he cautions Scarlett that Melanie's "going to have a difficult time, even in the best of circumstances – very narrow in the hips, as you know, and probably will need forceps for her delivery, so I don't want any ignorant darky midwife meddling with her. Women like her shouldn't ever have children" (316). Again, he doesn't seem to believe that midwives are inappropriate for all labors, but he foresees that Melanie will require extra attention and expertise.

Even though she survives Beau's birth without a doctor, or even the help of experienced matrons, Melanie cannot adequately care for him because of her physical limitations. In the wagon ride from Atlanta to Tara, she cannot produce enough milk to keep her child alive, so Scarlett is relieved when they come upon a cow that can supplement her sister-in-law's efforts (383). In an attempt to comfort her child, Melanie tries to hold him, but her hand "fall[s] short" (384) because she is too weak to reach him. At Tara, Dilcey, a slave who has just had her own child, nurses Beau (395). Even when elated that Ashley is soon to return from war and months after Beau is born, Melanie is "too thin, too white" (484). The country doctor, Dr. Fontaine, "concurred with Dr. Meade in saying she should never have had Beau. And he said frankly that another baby would kill her" (484). Even if, despite medical advice and expertise, she did survive a second pregnancy and labor, Melanie would face the same struggle in tending to the needs of that newborn infant as she had faced with sustaining the newborn Beau.

Obviously, Melanie's post-war body must struggle to reproduce without the assistance of male doctors, black wet nurses, and experienced matrons – all of whom are

eliminated or preoccupied by war – if Melanie is to pursue her dream of a big family. When Melanie goes into labor with Beau, Scarlett hurries to find Dr. Meade, who is preoccupied with hundreds of injured soldiers; when he refuses Scarlett, “his face was suddenly contorted with hate and rage, a rage not directed at [Scarlett] or anyone except a world wherein such things could happen” (349). His responsibility in this crisis is to try and save lives rather than bring a new one into that world. He can suggest only that Scarlett seek out his wife for help, but Atlanta’s matrons are either tending to the sick or fleeing the crumbling city (349). Melanie is left in Scarlett and Prissy’s less than capable hands – these women’s mothers have acted as midwives at desperate times but they have not had the time or opportunity to prepare their daughters for similar moments because war has altered their culture beyond recognition.

Melanie and her baby survive the labor, but she must rely on Dilcey, a Tara slave and new mother, to nurse him. Dilcey soothes Scarlett’s fears with the assurance that Beau is healthy “cept he hungry, and whut it take to feed a hungry chile I got” (395). Scarlett watches as the baby “pressed his pale rosebud mouth greedily to the dark nipple” (395). In this moment, Dilcey is bound by the culture and laws of slavery to help, but, in the not-so-distant future, Melanie would not have the assumed option of an “obligated” wet nurse. Her body would be alone in the fight for her survival and that of her son<sup>5</sup>.

If survival could be achieved by emotional grit alone, Melanie would succeed. She has always provided comfort to those around her even as her body fails. That comfort is first displayed with Scarlett’s first-born son and Melanie’s nephew Wade, who receives

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<sup>5</sup> Although Southern aristocratic women (a class Melanie belonged to before the war) might have considered wet nurses as status symbols and even continued to employ free black women after the war for that purpose, Mitchell uses the image of the wet nurse to emphasize Melanie’s physical weakness. Scarlett, in contrast, does not require assistance feeding her child. Regardless of historical accuracy, the symbolism highlights a distinction between the two mothers.

no such nurturing from his mother. Melanie “especially doted on him” (164) and “thought him adorable and said so, adding, ‘Oh you precious darling!’” (164) even while he cries. While recovering from her difficult labor, Melanie still manages to entertain Wade with stories and cuddle both Beau and Dilcey’s baby (416). After witnessing Melanie playing Yankees versus Rebels with the two boys, Scarlett admits to herself that “yes, Melanie had a way with children” (887), exuding “over-brimming affection” for them. For Wade, in particular, she is able to fill a gap created by his mother’s rejection of the maternal role. From his perspective, “usually Aunt Melly had all the time in the world to give him. She never said, as Mother so often did: ‘Don’t bother me now. I’m in a hurry!’ or ‘Run away, Wade. I am busy’” (823). Instead, his aunt takes the time to explain to him, in words he can understand, what is happening around him; for example, when Ella is born, Melanie tells him to play outside because “Dr. Meade has just brought [Scarlett] a nice little baby, a sweet little sister for [him] to play with, and if [he is] real good [he] can see her tonight” (823). Unlike Scarlett, whose mind is preoccupied with physical survival, Melanie has the mental and emotional energy to foster others’ emotional well-being.

She exhibits that mental fortitude even when her physical limitations interfere with her survival. In Atlanta, despite her advanced pregnancy, she “forgot her modesty and worked feverishly” (309) to nurse the wounded. In the name of the Cause, she can reject the notions – ingrained from childhood by the rigid Southern social circle – about women, childbearing, and the public. Eventually, however, her mind cannot override her body and she faints (309). Similarly, after Beau’s birth, she “[does] not complain” (409), but her “face [grows] thinner and whiter and [twitches] with pain even in her sleep”

(409); her body betrays the emotional state she longs to inhabit – one that is serene and contributes, in some way, to the situation of those around her.

One such situation is Scarlett's face-off with a Yankee straggler at Tara, who threatens to take the family's few possessions. Despite being sick in bed, when she hears what is happening downstairs, Melanie grabs Charles's sword and tries to drag it to the fight. Scarlett admits,

that had taken courage, the kind of courage Scarlett honestly knew she herself did not possess, the thin-steel, spun-silk courage which had characterized Melanie on the terrible night Atlanta fell and on the long trip home. It was the same intangible, unspectacular courage that all Wilkes possessed, a quality which Scarlett did not understand but to which she gave grudging tribute. (423)

Melanie fails to contribute any muscle to Scarlett's fight, but she does provide a stable source of brave, even if "unspectacular," energy. She stands behind Scarlett, understanding her choice to kill the soldier as self-defense. Scarlett is physically able to pull the trigger, but Melanie harbors the same intention, one that is thwarted only by her incapacitated body.

Even though she has the emotional capacity to be a mother, her physical weaknesses make her unsuitable for those challenges. Twice, the world Melanie seeks to populate attempts to stop her from reproducing. Beau is born in the middle of an Atlanta summer with the city under siege. With cannon fire and stifling heat surrounding the women, the scene resembles Hell, not the setting of the miracle of birth. The room in which Melanie is confined is dark because



Scarlett had pulled down the shades to shut out heat and brightness [. . .] the room was an oven and Scarlett's sweat-drenched clothes never dried but became wetter and stickier as the hours went by [. . .] Melanie lay on the bed on a sheet dark with perspiration and splotted with dampness. (353)

Her room is like a tomb while war rages just beyond the house. Even Dr. Meade seems to understand the circumstances as hopeless when he tells Scarlett he cannot abandon injured men for a “damned baby” (349). Here, his use of the word *damned* expresses more than just his frustration; he makes clear that the baby is condemned. It's being born into an uncertain world and will possibly have to navigate that world motherless.

Still, Melanie's courage brings her through these circumstances. She calls on the “thin-steel” bravery with which Scarlett later credits her and attempts to endure labor without disturbing others. At first, she is “silent [. . .] but at intervals her quiet face was wrenched with pain. She said, after each pain, ‘it wasn't very bad, really,’ and Scarlett knew she was lying” (342). Scarlett, recognizing that Melanie is holding back, snaps at her, “‘Melly, for God's sake, don't try to be brave. Yell, if you want to. There's nobody to hear you but us’” (353). In other words, from Scarlett's perspective, this isn't a time when courage will save Melanie. She can muster as much mental energy towards appearing courageous as she has, but now is a time to focus on surviving – not saving face.

As the world complicates that survival – with heat, inadequate help, and approaching Yankees – Melanie's mental fortitude begins to crumble. She moans and screams to release some of her pain (353) and repeatedly asks for Ashley (355).

Desperately, she looks to transfer some of that pain to Scarlett's stronger shoulders; she

clamped down on [Scarlett's hand] so hard she nearly broke the bones. After an hour of this, Scarlett's hands were so swollen and bruised she could hardly flex them. She knotted two long towels together and tied them to the foot of the bed and put the knotted end in Melanie's hands. Melanie hung onto it as though it were a life line, straining, pulling it taut, slackening it, tearing at it. Throughout the afternoon, her voice went on like an animal dying in a trap. (354)

In this moment, Melanie and her unborn child are left to fight their circumstances alone, reduced to their animal selves. She cannot rely on anyone else to alleviate her suffering or speed up her progress, nor can she rely on the social code constructed especially to deny her animal nature. Her own weak and inadequate body is one trap and Atlanta – desolate and occupied by the enemy – is another. Scarlett and the other physically sound individuals can flee, but Melanie is confined in order to bear her child, which she may not even be strong enough to do.

When it seems that she won't survive, Melanie tries to give herself over to this hostile world. She instructs Scarlett to leave her because "[she's] going to die" (355) anyway. Again, her emotional resilience is not strong enough to defeat her body's weakness nor the apocalyptic conditions swarming outside. Melanie is clearly unlike Scarlett, who can vow never to go hungry again when her bodily limitations are tested because she is able to farm and scavenge. Melanie can make no such a proclamation on the occasion of Beau's birth. Scarlett's body can overcome her mind's sense of desolation or loss whereas Melanie's body cannot survive merely because she wills it to.

In the battle of mind over matter during Beau's death, Melanie wins. She is weak but alive. Years later, when she tries to transcend her body's limitations by getting

pregnant again, she does not have the same fortunate outcome. She miscarries the child and dies in the process (930). Rather than be content with her healthy son and sufficient personal health, she challenges her circumstances and loses. In her thorough analysis of the circumstances under which Mitchell wrote, *Tomorrow Is Another Day: The Woman Writer in the South 1859-1936*, Anne Jones recognizes Melanie's death as her ultimate fate, claiming, "Melanie's meshing with and ultimately redefining her culture's prescription for womanhood give her security and nobility, but finally death" (338). Society would have allowed and even encouraged her to live without bearing more children because she is an archetype of the Southern lady who would facilitate recreation of an antebellum way of life. Melanie is, however, not safe from her own desires. When she succumbs to those desires, her emotional support of others living through crisis is lost to the struggling society. When Melanie dies, she takes with her an emotional strength from which others living through crisis could benefit. Not only is Beau left without a mother, but Scarlett, Ashley, Rhett, and Scarlett's children are left without their primary nurturer. Because she craves biological motherhood so strongly, Melanie sacrifices her opportunity to sustain the traditional performance of Southern motherhood through her influence on others on the spectrum.

## Conclusion

Mitchell's first assignment at the *Journal Magazine Sunday Magazine* of Atlanta was to report on current Italian fashions as observed by the traveling socialite Mary Hines Gunsaulus, who also happened to witness the Fascisti's overthrow of the Italian government. Mitchell's piece, found in a collection of her articles, *Margaret Mitchell: Reporter*, edited by Patrick Allen, is an enlightening blend of political and social commentary, as exhibited by its organization. The article, titled "Atlanta Girl Sees Italian Revolution" (3), describes Gunsaulus's first-person account of Mussolini's rise to power, followed by a section titled "No Chance for Short Skirts" (4), which focuses on Parisian fashion trends, and then rounded out with "Everything Cheap in Germany" (5), in which Gunsaulus compares the value of the German mark to that of Confederate currency towards the end of the Civil War. Mitchell claims that she focused on the fashion, only including a brief note about Fascism, and her editor decided to bring the latter to the forefront of the piece (xi). Regardless of who decided the final organization, Mitchell recognized that by reporting on a popular issue, like fashion, she could make a statement about politics: Italy was facing revolution, Germany's economic system was failing, and Paris was still concerned with frocks. Her column, which would have garnered the attention of young females, probably sent a powerful additional message about European affairs. She would use the same strategy fourteen years later when she published a Civil War romance that challenges ideas about nationalism, race relations, women, and, most important for my purposes, the culturally constructed model of motherhood.

Mitchell, already bending gender roles as a female journalist, adapted the genre traditionally more available to women writers – fiction – so that she could interrogate the social construction of the female in the antebellum and post-bellum South. Even though

Hollywood glamorized her story – Clark Gable embracing Vivien Leigh on the road to Tara, for example – more important themes rest beneath the surface of her conventional romance plot. Mitchell, who had already experienced the power of the pen to reach the public, would know that even though a story might seem to be about fashion, it can also reveal something significant about Fascism. One of the women for whom Mitchell created opportunities, Toni Morrison, in her Nobel Prize in Literature acceptance speech, articulates the power of fiction to comment on reality; she explains, “narrative has never been merely a source of entertainment for [her]. It is, [she] believe[s], one of the principal ways in which we absorb knowledge” (417). So, even though *Gone with the Wind* certainly entertains, Mitchell also created knowledge – knowledge to which a broad audience has now been exposed. High-schoolers uninterested in world politics and matured men nostalgic for the old days still read the best seller. Thus, Mitchell’s creation has had to translate to audiences across time and cultural shifts through complex rhetorical strategies. Young women, in particular, might see themselves – or future and possible selves – in Scarlett’s aspirations regarding financial independence as that goal is complicated by children or in Melanie’s desperate desire for family. Considering that Mitchell’s initial female readership would have been partially composed of flappers, females who pushed the boundaries of social decorum, they might have been open to the author’s revised interpretation of motherhood. Reader receptivity is an important ingredient of narrative power, according to Anne Jones in *Tomorrow Is Another Day: The Woman Writer in the South, 1859-1936*; Jones thinks that narrative “can become a strategy for speaking truths publicly – but only for those who choose to hear and believe that stories can be true” (39). Considering the public’s lingering obsession with Rhett and

Scarlett's fate as a couple – a phenomenon thoroughly explored by Carmen Gomez Galisteo in *The Wind Is Never Gone* – stories do seem to be a strong, lasting part of the American psyche.

That phenomenon has succeeded in perpetuating the book's status as a literary cultural force. According to *Publisher's Weekly*, the novel sold 176,000 hardcover copies when first published in 1936, had sold over one million copies by 1938, and, with the release of the film in 1939, that number surpassed two million (Andriani). Its success has continued, with tens of thousands of copies sold each year since 1936:

Macmillan holds the original rights to the novel, and *GWTW* moved to S&S when it acquired Macmillan. S&S estimates it sells close to 75,000 copies of the book every year in hardcover, trade paperback, mass-market paperback, and e-book formats. Prior to 1993, other license holders had published millions of copies of the book. Warner published a mass-market edition of *Wind* from 1993 to 2007, selling 650,000 copies. In 2007, paperback rights returned to Scribner; it now has almost 150,000 copies of its 2007 trade paperback edition in print. (Andriani)

These numbers suggest that regardless of what happens politically – WWII, Vietnam, Watergate, 9/11 – Mitchell's story continues to resonate with readers. Molly Haskell, author of *Frankly, My Dear: Gone with the Wind Revisited* compares the story's staying power to that of the film *The Wizard of Oz* (released the same year as *GWTW*). Haskell believes that, as a public, we are still enthralled with Mitchell's story because of "its vast and politically charged canvas, its depiction of the tensions that still underlie our Union [. . .] some issues receding into the mists of antiquity, others emerging as oddly topical" (17). The points of tension and issues that Haskell refers to are most likely race,

socioeconomic class, gender relations, and the struggle to form a national identity. In 2012, one does not need to look far to find where those tensions present themselves today – the Trayvon Martin case in Florida, the US Supreme Court debate on the legality of national healthcare, and, most relevant for my purposes, the conversations happening on both sides of the political aisle regarding women’s health in terms of affordable birth control and abortion. A new set of readers from this generation may see their own struggle in Scarlett’s frustration with the children she didn’t choose to have or Melanie’s debilitating health problems, which prevent her from being the mother she wants to be.

Women today, then, may come to feel as if they still sit in the “mists of antiquity”(17) Haskell mentions, because concerns about motherhood are suddenly “oddly topical” (17). Presumably, Haskell also refers to the mist that enshrouds Scarlett at the novel’s end (Mitchell 944). Her future is hazy – Rhett is gone and Melanie is dead. The reader is left in a similar fog – will Scarlett win Rhett back? Will she return to Tara and start over? And, what will happen to her children? Such uncertainty was a reality for Mitchell’s readers, too; World War I and the Great Depression ushered in a sense of mystification – the economy unstable, the government unstable, and their identities as women unstable. With such instability, however, comes opportunity. Women became active agents in re-defining themselves because crisis or, more importantly, survival through crisis requires an ability to adapt. One is called to run the office or factory rather than the kitchen or nursery because those are the professions most beneficial to the country at a specific moment. Scarlett and Melanie’s nation needed them to mother the New South, literally and figuratively, but they answered by selfishly clinging to spots on either extreme of the motherhood spectrum.

Motherhood, from Mitchell's perspective, then, means making choices, and an analysis of her most famous characters reveals consequences. Individual choices will affect not only your identity but also the culture's interpretation of your performance of that identity. Each revised performance then alters, however slightly, collective assumptions about that role. When Scarlett chooses to focus on her children's physical safety instead of their emotional nourishment, she soothes her own fears about starvation and poverty. By doing so, she neglects to indoctrinate her children into patriarchy *or* prepare them for whatever crises they'll face in adulthood. Unlike Ellen, who never experienced poverty or an extended war and could therefore not prepare her daughters for tragedy, Scarlett knows how harsh the world can be but still decides to channel her energy into her offsprings' immediate survival rather than also taking into account their long-term well-being. Her interpretation of motherhood is rooted in the admirable intention of feeding her children but is selfish because it neglects contribution to their long-term survival as individuals or the overall endurance of the nation. Melanie also makes a selfish decision, but the consequences of her choice are drastically different than Scarlett's. After miraculously surviving labor to give birth to a healthy baby boy, she is told by two doctors (the only ones in Atlanta and her piece of back-country Georgia) to avoid future pregnancies because she most likely won't survive. Instead of raising Beau as the Southern gentlemen she longs to see re-populate the South, she gets pregnant and dies during a miscarriage – leaving her living son in the hands of others to be raised as they see fit. She relinquishes her power as a mother, a move ironic and selfish because she could have remained content with raising Beau and mothering the many others who are emotionally suffering around her (i.e., Rhett and Scarlett). She, too, neglects to re-



build traditional Southern identity by raising a son who could replace the Tarleton twins and other Southern gentlemen killed for the Cause.

Some of Mitchell's twentieth-century female readers, rising and current members of the Women's Rights Movement, would have faced or will face a similar choice, but they have substantially more power than Scarlett and Melanie had because, in addition to having hindsight's benefits, they can vote and earn money without public scorn. Scarlett and Melanie's power is rooted in their performance of motherhood, particularly since the fathers of two of Scarlett's children are dead and Ashley is at war for a substantial portion of Beau's early life. They can raise their children without the *direct* interference of patriarchy. With World War II on the horizon, Mitchell's readers face the same opportunity (or problem, depending on perspective), but their potential for resisting patriarchy is supported by outlets of power Melanie and Scarlett lacked – money and the vote. They can contribute to the national agenda without having children. They can effect social change in new, perhaps more effective ways. Scarlett and Melanie's fates suggest, however, that whether a woman chooses to consider motherhood a priority or not, her performance of that role will shape her culture's progress in every direction. Scarlett's surviving children are not prepared for crisis, and Melanie is no longer a source of the nurture that humans need in crisis moments.

Noticeably, Mitchell devotes more pages to developing Scarlett's interpretation of motherhood; her coverage of this argument is nearly double that devoted to Melanie's. The obvious narrative reason for this difference is that Scarlett is a dynamic character who transforms from chasing beaux to chasing profits; her priorities drastically shift as the story progresses. We have no way of knowing how she would have treated her

children under better (or more stable) circumstances. As the mistress of a thriving plantation, would she have welcomed babies? Melanie, on the other hand, is a static character because she wants nothing more than children from the outset and continues to want those children, no matter how many warnings to the contrary she receives. Melanie's trajectory seems undisturbed by the war; she wants a big family whether food or medical care is available or not. Even Scarlett recognizes this monomaniacal vision in Melanie and silently addresses her:

“You're one of those people the war didn't change and you go right on thinking and acting just like nothing happened – like we were still rich as Croesus and had more food than we know what to do with and guests didn't matter. I guess I've got you on my neck for the rest of my life.” (471)

The war strikes a chord in Scarlett that seems unaffected in others. Her performance of motherhood is transformed when she reacts to forces outside of her control, whereas Melanie's fate, because her physical weakness is a personal and not a political problem, is not a product of war but a consequence of her choice. Scarlett can support Melanie because Scarlett adapted to survive.

Although Scarlett's ability to adapt and survive is representative of American innovation and resilience, Melanie is a symbol of the antebellum way of life and a beacon of Christian guidance for members of the Old Guard trying to sustain their culture. Even through the worst conditions, she upholds her Christian values – taking in convicts who fought for the Cause, ignoring her husband and Scarlett's painfully obvious emotional connection. Mitchell describes Melanie as a “Christian character so honorable that she could not conceive of dishonor to others” (qtd. in Pyron), so she was surprised that critics

considered Scarlett to be the novel's heroine instead of Ellen or Melanie (Mitchell 123). Gayle Rogers, in "The Changing Image of the Southern Woman: A Performer on a Pedestal," asserts that Ellen and Melanie *are* ideal Southern ladies, in part because of their faith. Rogers explains, "like all great mythical ladies, Melanie evokes noble behavior from all of those who come in contact with her, expect perhaps Scarlett" (61) – who later reforms because of Melanie's dying words that make her realize she loves Rhett, not Ashley (Mitchell 946). But, like Ellen, whom Scarlett imagines as the Virgin Mary, Melanie's goodwill cannot carry her through crisis. Spiritual faith fails these two women just as unwavering faith in the Cause fails the South. When Melanie selfishly decides to try for another child, she ceases to be a source of Christian strength and emotional nourishment for others. She has joined the numerous other dead mothers – her own and Ellen included – who bore and raised the Southern people and by extension the South. She could not carry her child to full term in the same way her culture could not develop into a mature and independent nation by relying on faith alone. Jones explains Melanie's death as an unwillingness to change to meet her new world because "meshing with and ultimately redefining her culture's prescription for womanhood gives her security and nobility, but finally death" (338). Instead of taking that redefinition farther to include mothering without biological children as an acceptable option for women, Melanie stops. Entzminger observes this as Mitchell's deliberate statement about who can and cannot live in this new world; she asserts that "Mitchell makes it clear that Melanie's time has passed and that Melanie, though good, lacks the physical stamina to survive in the fallen South" (113). So, "though good" and though Christian, Melanie's physical

weakness overcomes her; similarly, despite the South's belief in the Cause, the army was ultimately too feeble, too under-prepared, and too under-funded to win.

Because Scarlett survives the tragic consequences of the military's loss, managing in the meantime to give birth to three healthy children, Mitchell suggests that she, not Melanie, is meant to populate the New South; Scarlett contributes bodies to the new nation, but she doesn't contribute children who will likely survive the next cycle of crisis. Her neglect of her children's emotional well-being is almost excusable while she struggles to put food on Tara's table, but after securing her marriage to Frank, who has a successful business and could support a family, she does not turn her attention to Wade and Ella's care. Her finances are even more secure as Rhett's wife, but she insists on maintaining the mills instead of making up for lost time with her family. She is so wrapped up in the present moment that she cannot foresee a time when Wade and Ella might need to endure similar hardships without the support of their mother. To protect herself, she does refuse to look back and reminisce about the pre-war days (Mitchell 407). Unlike Melanie and the Atlanta matrons, who try to re-build those days, Scarlett reconstructs a new world that also allows her to preserve herself.

Rather than reject motherhood, like Scarlett, or become entirely consumed by that role, like Melanie, Mitchell advocates balance among women, particularly when those women live in an unstable culture. If war and poverty create a rupture in the patriarchal structure, women can radically reinterpret and reform their performances of motherhood to survive, but they cannot shake off the burden of children. Unlike Melanie and Scarlett, who do not grasp the power of their mothering role to shape their current and future culture, Mitchell's female readers have the momentum of the Women's Right Movement

to propel them forward. Their performances of motherhood can be sources of feminine strength capable of guiding or nurturing society through crisis.

Until patriarchy is no longer the norm, however, women will always be in a sort of constant crisis over gender roles and expectations. Culture instructs women to earn an education, succeed at a career, enter into marriage, and raise well-adjusted children; if a woman is *too* successful or has *too many/not enough* children, though, she threatens the safety of the space reserved for her, the home, and the one she is invading, the workplace. It is unacceptable to occupy only one domain. Stay-at-home moms fight the stereotype that their work is not *work* (recently illustrated by accusations from a media pundit that Ann Romney, GOP primary candidate Mitt Romney's wife, hasn't worked a day in her life because she was never on a company's payroll, despite raising five children). Career women, on the other hand, are reminded by primetime television and popular magazines that their "biological clocks are ticking" if they do not settle down and start a family. Until the definition of work is revised or the value of a body is not only or primarily derived from biology, women must be conscious of their contributions to the stability of patriarchal structure that fosters those sorts of definitions and derivatives. Their contributions can exist on individual and national levels: when a female undergraduate student defers to her male classmates in class discussions (rather than offering her opinion), or when a female politician neglects to propose or vote for legislation that would close the pay equality gap, patriarchy is strengthened. A mother is charged with an even greater obligation because she is responsible for her reactions and her children's reactions to socially constructed expectations: when she does not advocate for extended and paid maternity leave from her job, or when she does not foster her daughter's

possible interest in science or math or her son's desire to be a nurse or study literature, she buttresses the current structure. Women who choose to remain childless and focus on their careers, a hobby, or a marriage can model that unique spectrum position for the daughters of others (relatives, friends, and otherwise), thus nurturing the outlook of future generations. Thus, if women's performances reinforce instead of challenge patriarchy and they do not exhibit resistance for their offspring, the status quo goes unchallenged. Mothering and the multiple interpretations of that role are, like the narrative, valuable sources of power; in the same way that Scarlett raises lumber mills, Rhett cares for the women in his life, and Tara shelters her occupants, Mitchell's readers can give birth to ideas or change rather than just babies.

Whether intentionally or not, Mitchell enacted that practice in her personal life. Though married twice, she never had children but birthed a book that exposes problems with patriarchy's image of motherhood. That image needed to be exposed because its cultural strength is perpetuated by the glamorization of the mother's role. Phrases such as "the miracle of life" for the process of becoming a mother or "bundle of joy" for the product of that process mask the reality that being a mother – being responsible for another human being's livelihood – is complicated. Reality TV programs focus on either the birth (TLC's *A Baby Story*, for example) or unusual circumstances surrounding pregnancy and motherhood (such as "too many" children, teenage pregnancy, women who mistake pregnancy for indigestion). Conditioned by such extreme narratives, viewers are not as interested in following the realistic and far more common tale of a single or married mother who transitions from the workforce to the home and back to the workforce in a matter of weeks – weeks that are full of responsibilities, worries, and

possibly depression. Our cultural master narrative tells us that motherhood is completely self-fulfilling; a baby should be enough. This glamorization of a socially constructed limited role is a source of power for patriarchy – it’s a power, unless challenged, that propels an unexamined American Dream forward, a dream increasingly focused on a work-life balance. Women with personal narratives that do not fit into the cultural one – those who struggle to conceive, experience a miscarriage, suffer from post-partum depression, or choose to become a parent without a partner – are Othered. Furthermore, if women do not interrogate and challenge the categories of mothering created for them – spinsters, Soccer Moms, June Cleavers, among others – they contribute to the stability of the structures that seek to keep them in a fixed place. Their performances of motherhood are de-valued rather than celebrated for creating yet another space on the spectrum, and for representing alternative futures for women and thus for their children and our culture.

All of those performances begin with women ripping their bodies as a doctor, midwife, partner, or silent internal voice tells them to “push!” Mitchell wants women to do a different kind of pushing, a kind that creates opposition to the patriarchal forces trying to keep them in their assigned places. Whether that resistance births children who break glass ceilings, legislation that helps the children of other women do just that, or narratives that challenge the existing cultural construction of the mother’s role, women must re-claim for themselves both the spectrum and their individual spot on it.

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Thesis: Mothers at Work: Reconstruction and Construction of Patriarchy in *Gone with the Wind*

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Marshall University, B.A., magna cum laude and University Honors, **English**, 2010

Concentration: Literature.

Marshall University, B.A., magna cum laude and University Honors, **Political Science**, 2010

Concentration: American Politics.

**PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE**

2011-2012: First Year Composition Teaching Assistant, Marshall University

2010-2011: Tutor, Writing Center, Marshall University

**ACADEMIC SERVICE**

2011-2012: Graduate Representative, Chair's Advisory Committee, Marshall University

2010-2011: Graduate Representative, Graduate Program Committee, Marshall University

**PUBLICATIONS**

2011: Marshall University College of Liberal Arts Annual Report faculty profiles

2011: "It's a Two-Way Street: Productive Conversation with Your Tutor," Marshall University Writing Center newsletter

**CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS**

2010: "The Evolution of Scarlett O'Hara from Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*." Paper, Stand for Women Conference. Huntington, WV. April 2, 2011.

**AWARDS AND DISTINCTIONS**

*Marian Alexander Blake and Merrill Clifford Blake Scholarship in Confederate Literature*, Marshall University, 2010-2012